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ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

FINAL

Pursuant to: Montana Environmental Policy Act
Section 69-6504 (b) (3)

and

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969

Project No. FG-14

West Shore State Park

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Prepared by

Montana Fish and Game Department

Recreation and Parks Division

Helena, Montana

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MONTANA FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

WEST SHORE STATE PARK

I. PURPOSE

West Shore State Park is located on the west shore of Flathead Lake. The ruggedness and beauty of the site combine with an extensive view of Flathead Lake and the Mission Mountains to provide a scenic beauty of the highest quality. The park has been in existence since 1955. The project is designed to provide a vista point with interpretive displays which will portray historic events, points of interest in the Flathead Valley, species of trees and plants commonly found in the park together with ecological items of interest. These improvements will be added to facilities which have been in existence for a number of years and will result in further enhancement and attractiveness of the site.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The park site is situated approximately twenty miles south of Kalispell and thirty-three miles north of Polson on the west shore of Flathead Lake. U. S. Highway 93 is adjacent to the park on the west side. The park contains 140 acres.

Proposed developments include a vista point with interpretive displays, improvements to a connecting road to the interpretive center, a double latrine, additional signing and an extension to the existing boat ramp.

III. DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

A. Human Resources

West Shore State Park is located on the extreme northern edge of Lake County with Flathead County almost immediately adjacent. Lake County has a population of 14,445 and Flathead County has a population of 39,460. Kalispell, located twenty miles to the north, has a population of 10,526 and Polson to the south has 2,464. The shoreline to the north and south of the park is partially developed with summer homes and some resorts.

The Flathead area has the highest "exposure indices" for vacation travel in the state. It is estimated that nearly 1.5 million out-of-state travelers will visit the area during a twelve month period. In addition, there are many thousands of visitors from Montana that are attracted to the area each year. All of these visitors are seeking outdoor recreation

such as fishing, swimming, boating, camping, picnicking, as well as more leisure activities including site seeing. The facilities planned for West Shore State Park are designed to help meet this demand.

B. Physiography and Geology

The topography of the site is variable from steeply sloping to slightly sloping. The central elevation of the park is 3,234 feet above sea level or 342 feet above the shores of Flathead Lake. From this central prominence the site slopes steeply to a level of approximately 3,000 feet then forms a slightly sloping bench approximately 100 feet above the level of the lake and then breaks off sharply at the shore of the lake with 50 to 60 foot bluffs.

The vista site provides a panoramic view of Flathead Lake and the Mission Mountains bordering the lake to the east.

Bedrock here consists of Precambrian age carbonate rocks belonging to the Piegan group of the Belt series. This group consists of fine gray to light gray limestone and dolomite. Glacial till consisting of gravels, silt and clay overlie the bedrock in places.

C. Land Use

There is evidence of logging on the site that took place in the late 1890's or early 1900's. The state park system acquired 67 acres of the park in 1955 and an additional 73 acres in 1966. Since that time the area has been devoted to public use for camping, picnicking, swimming and boating. The developed public use areas occupy not more than 25 acres of the entire park. The balance of the park is covered with trees and brush and is being retained in natural condition.

D. Fish and Wildlife

Flathead Lake is considered to be the most important body of water in Montana from the standpoint of number of days of fisherman use. Based upon fishing pressure estimates made a few years ago, it receives approximately 125,000 fisherman days use annually. The lake supports 21 species of fish of which nine are considered as game fish. Most important are the westslope cutthroat trout, Dolly Varden, kokanee salmon, lake trout, and lake whitefish.

Flathead Lake is comparatively infertile with a maximum depth of 400 feet and an area of 126,000 surface acres. Fishing success in the lake is considered to be good to excellent. Fishing efforts can range from a catch of pan sized fish to a large (20 to 30 pound) trophy size trout.

The park has good habitat for deer and they will be seen in the spring, fall, and winter months. They are seldom seen during the summer months when visitors are using the site. Rabbits, squirrels, and other small animals are regular inhabitants.

E. Vegetative Resources

The chief tree species found on the site are Douglas fir and western larch and the stands are moderate to heavy. The high promontory is free of overstory and generally surrounded by thick stands of bitterbrush. The northeastern portion of the park is covered with a dense stand of young Douglas fir. Native grasses and flowers are abundant.

F. Climate

The climate is considered to be moderate for Montana. During the summer months there is considerable sunshine and the temperature reaches into the mid 90's. The nights are generally cool. During the winter the temperature seldom will drop below zero with many overcast days. On occasion the lake will freeze over in the winter and the temperature may get down as low as 20 degrees below zero.

G. Transportation Systems

There are no railroads or other transportation media in the project location. U. S. Highway 93 is adjacent to the park on the west border and provides excellent access.

H. Utility Systems

Telephone and power lines are adjacent to the west boundary and are within the highway right-of-way. An overhead electric service line traverses the park from the primary source on the highway to the water system and other outlets in the park.

IV. EVALUATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

A. Environmental Impact of Proposed Action

West Shore State Park has been used by the public as a recreation area since it was acquired in 1955. Between 1966 and 1968 the camping areas were enlarged and more facilities were added to accommodate increased water based activities and demand for overnight camping. The proposed project will provide an additional attraction at the vista point and interpretation center.

None of the proposed construction will affect the water quality of the lake, atmospheric quality, erosion, deposition or sedimentation.

The roads and parking areas will be paved with a two shot oil penetration. The road construction will follow an existing road and will be widened to accommodate two-way traffic. It will be necessary to remove some of the bitterbrush along the road alignment to attain proper width for the driving lanes. Plans call for the road width to be 24 feet with two foot shoulders. Cuts and fills will be kept to a minimum with slopes as flat as practicable to blend with the existing terrain and to minimize erosion. Any scars will be reseeded after construction. The parking area has been planned to fit into the topography with a minimum amount of brush cutting and the removal of only a few small trees.

The interpretive panels will be placed on low rock mounts and will blend in with the terrain on the vista point. The foot paths leading from the parking area to the vista point will be paved to resist erosion and meander on a gentle grade. Some clearing of bitterbrush will be required for the foot paths.

The latrine will be located near the parking area. It will have a sealed fiber glass tank with a drain field. Ground water is many feet below the surface at this location and the lake is several hundred feet away. The chance of polluting either ground water or surface water is remote.

The existing concrete boat ramp will be extended and will not involve any cutting or filling of the shoreline. Work will be completed while the lake is low.

It is not anticipated that there will be any health or safety hazards in the area.

B. Adverse Environmental Effects Which Cannot Be Avoided

The project is considered to have a minimum of adverse environmental effects. The problems associated with public visitation such as litter and garbage collection and general maintenance are already in existence in the area and the project will not present any new situations.

C. Alternatives

An alternative to the proposed project would be to eliminate all construction and leave the site in its present state.

The rugged beauty of the site and the extensive view of Flathead Lake and the Mission Mountains afford an excellent opportunity for the development of an interpretive system based upon the points of interest and the ecology of the region. The average visitor is conditioned by his urban background to the modern convenience of living. There is, however, a curiosity, a desire to see, to photograph and learn new things while vacationing. An interpretive program will contribute to visitor satisfaction and generally create quality experiences without increasing pressure on the resource or compounding the environmental impact of public use. The project is intended to provide this service.

D. Short Term--Long Term Use

At the time of the construction of the road and facilities there will be some environmental intrusions on the site. The road work will create dust and noise situations and there will be materials and construction equipment in evidence. These intrusions will be quite short in duration.

After the construction work has been completed, the road and vista point will be opened for public use. The new road and parking area is designed to take care of the anticipated use for several years. The park is already under management care, and this will be extended to the facilities at the vista point.

E. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

The construction contemplated in the project is not considered to be irreversible or irretrievable as the roadway and parking area could be restored to their original condition.

F. Discussion of Problems and Objections by Other Agencies and the Public

West Shore State Park is an attractive area and receives many visits from fishermen, water sports enthusiasts, and summer tourists each year. It is a popular site and the proposed developments are expected to receive acceptance from the public.

V. BENEFITS

Interpretive programs are designed to provide a service to the individual. The goal is to enhance visitor satisfaction and enjoyment. Quality experiences are promoted through the recognition and understanding of natural values. A primary concern of this project at West Shore is the communication of these ideas

and to create an awareness of natural forces and how they affect the environment.

The program is designed to accomplish these objectives through the planned interpretive devices.

VI. SUMMARY STATEMENT

The installation of the facilities planned for the project will create minor environmental impacts. The techniques used will soften any impacts to an acceptable quality. The public will benefit from visits to the interpretive center and will have a greater awareness and understanding of the environmental features of the park and the surrounding area.