

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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

and

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969

Project No. FG-13

Beartooth State Recreation Area

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Prepared by

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MONTANA FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
BEARTOOTH STATE RECREATION AREA

I. PURPOSE

In 1970 the Fish and Game Department purchased the Beartooth Game Range, an area containing approximately 33,000 acres of deeded and leased lands. The purchase was made possible by funds available under the Pittman-Robertson Act. The game range is located on the east shore of Holter Lake and makes several miles of lakeshore frontage available for public use. Although the main objective of the purchase was to provide winter game range, the intent of this project is to install the necessary facilities to make several locations along the lake frontage available for use by the public.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The Beartooth State Recreation Area is located approximately 45 miles north of Helena. Access to the site is via Interstate Highway 15 to Wolf Creek and then by county road to the area.

Three sites along the county road have been selected for development. They have been named Juniper Bay, Log Gulch, and Departure Point. Facilities planned for installation at these points include picnic tables, fireplaces, latrines, and garbage containers. A well and a boat ramp will also be constructed at Log Gulch. The necessary access roads and parking areas will be included in the installations.

The planned facilities are designed to provide camping, picnicking, fishing, and boating.

In addition, four small parking areas will be constructed at convenient locations along the county road for fishing access. Trash cans and racks will be placed at each location.

III. DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

A. Human Resources

The Beartooth Recreation Area is located in a rural area. There are several summer homes adjacent to the county road that leads to the recreation sites. There are a few dwellings on the west side of the river below the Montana Power dam which creates Holter Lake. These house the employees of the Montana Power Company. There are no other dwellings within the immediate area of the recreation sites included in the project. Wolf Creek,

with a population of 100, is the nearest community. It is adjacent to Interstate 15, approximately ten miles from the recreation areas.

Holter Lake has long been a popular fishing and boating area for residents of Helena and Great Falls. Recreation facilities have been lacking and the project is designed to provide the necessary developments to accommodate this use.

B. Physiography and Geology

The top of the spillway at Holter Dam is at elevation 3548. The reservoir is operated at a fairly stable elevation and ordinarily fluctuates between elevations 3560 and 3564. The recreation areas are all located adjacent to the reservoir and generally will be located at elevation 3570 to 3600 or above. This will keep them well above any possible high water in the reservoir.

From the lakeshore the land rises rather abruptly to elevations in excess of 5000 feet. From these higher elevations there are three drainages, Log Gulch, Cottonwood Creek, and Willow Creek that empty into the reservoir. The project includes developments to be located at the mouth of Log Gulch.

Madison limestone of Mississippian age makes up the majority of rock outcrops in this area. Sandstone and shale members are included in this unit, parts of which are dolomite.

C. Land Use

Prior to the acquisition of the Beartooth Game Range by the Fish and Game Department, the land was used for cattle grazing by the previous owners. Grazing by livestock has been stopped and the range is now devoted to fish and wildlife habitat, primarily for elk and deer. During the 1971 recreation season, the areas along the county road and adjacent to the lake received considerable public use. The reservoir is managed by the Montana Power Company for hydroelectric power generation.

D. Fish and Wildlife

Fishing in Holter Reservoir has been provided by planting 6-inch rainbow trout after high water has been spilled in the spring. Rainbow comprise the bulk of the fishery and average 14 to 15 inches long. Brown trout are creelied in lesser numbers; these average around 18 inches and weigh about two pounds. Other game fish caught include walleye, mountain whitefish, and kokanee. Nongame fish include suckers, carp, and numerous small perch. Netting by the Fish and Game Department shows that the fish population is concentrated in the lower one-third of the reservoir.

Big game found on the game range include mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, bear, mountain goats, and antelope. Mountain sheep have been planted on the area. Now that the area is being managed for wildlife, it is anticipated that these game herds will provide good hunting in season for the sportsmen.

Some ruffed grouse and some blue grouse will be found in suitable habitat on the area. Furbearers, predators, eagles, hawks, owls, migratory waterfowl, shore birds, songbirds, and small mammals also occur on the game range.

E. Vegetative Resources

Tree cover on the game range is spotty with some of the area containing good stands and sparse stands in other locations. Ponderosa pine will be found in the dryer areas and Douglas fir in the more protected portions. There is scattered juniper growth mixed in with the ponderosa pine. Willow, chokecherry, skunkbrush, and other shrub species are usually found in the drainages.

Native grasses and forbs are beginning to thrive. There are many wild flowers on the entire area.

F. Climate

The climate in this area is generally moderate to cool. Daytime temperatures in the summer months will seldom exceed 90 degrees and the nights are cool. Winter temperatures get quite cold although chinook winds will occasionally reach the range. The reservoir freezes over in the winter. Snow depths will accumulate from 18 inches to two feet and winter winds cause drifting problems from time to time.

G. Transportation Systems

The only road in the general area is a county road from the frontage road north of Wolf Creek to the headquarters of the game range. There are no major highways or railroads in the project location.

H. Utility Systems

There is a utility line that carries both power and telephone service to the game range headquarters from the main lines near Wolf Creek.

IV. EVALUATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

A. Environmental Impact of Proposed Action

The project does not include any construction or other

influences that will adversely affect the water quality, atmospheric quality, erosion, deposition, or sedimentation. There will be some disturbance to the grasses and forbs on the interior road alignment and parking areas. No other disturbance to grasses, shrubs, or trees is anticipated.

Roads and parking areas will be designed with a minimum of interference to scenic values and vistas.

All interior roads and parking areas will be graveled surface. The two-way roads will be twenty feet wide and the one-way roads will be twelve feet wide. The vegetation on the road and parking area alignments is generally sparse with little topsoil to support growth. Any topsoil that is encountered will be used for revegetation purposes on scarred areas.

A boat ramp and parking area will be constructed in the Log Gulch site. In addition there will be four single latrines with sealed fiber glass vaults, a water well along with picnic tables, fireplaces, and garbage racks and cans. Effluent from the sealed fiber glass vaults is removed and hauled away by a contractor who provides this service. Disposal is to be provided in any approved manner by the contractor. It is his responsibility to make the proper disposal.

A parking area, picnic tables, fireplaces, and garbage cans will be installed at the Juniper Bay site. Two single latrines were placed at this location last year.

A parking area, picnic tables, fireplaces, garbage cans, and two single latrines will be placed at Departure Point. An existing well will be rehabilitated also.

The well at Log Gulch will be drilled to a depth of 40 feet or more. Actual depth will depend upon where the driller locates a suitable supply of water. The well will be cased with 6" ID standard well casing to a height 12" above the ground level. A hand pump will be attached to the well and rest on a 6' x 6' cement platform.

The well at Departure Point has been capped and sealed. The seal will be removed and the well pumped to determine volume. Disinfectants will be placed in the well to remove any impurities that may be present. The well will again be pumped to purge it of the disinfectant and then samples will be taken and submitted to the Board of Health for testing.

The danger of fire is present in any campground area whether man-caused or by lightning. Precautions taken to prevent fire include gravel pads around picnic tables and fire grates. Fires will be confined to fire grates and fire circles. Roadways and parking areas are effective fire breaks.

The installation of all facilities has been planned with a minimum of intrusions. Scenic vistas and views have been provided for wherever possible.

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

B. Adverse Environmental Effects Which Cannot Be Avoided

The project is considered to have a minimum of adverse environmental effects. The development sites have been used by the public without proper sanitation and other necessary facilities. Litter problems have been created along with loss of vegetation by indiscriminate vehicular use. These situations will be corrected by the installation of barriers and traffic control devices.

C. Alternatives

An alternative to the proposed project would be to eliminate all construction and not install the facilities as planned. This approach has been rejected because the area is popular and there is demand by the public to take advantage of the recreational opportunities available. In addition, we plan to expand the facilities in the future as funds become available because of the heavy use this area is experiencing.

D. Short Term--Long Term Use

Minor environmental intrusions will occur during the construction period. These will be confined to the appearance of construction equipment, dust created by the use of the equipment, and miscellaneous stacks and piles of materials. These intrusions will be eliminated when the project is completed.

A small gravel pit will be utilized which is now in existence on the county road. After sufficient gravel has been removed from the site for the construction of the roads and parking areas, the pit slopes will be graded and grass will be seeded for stabilization.

The intent will be to achieve a natural and pleasing appearance.

When the project is completed the public will have a better opportunity to enjoy the recreational resources offered by the area. The area will be given protection from sanitation and erosion problems that are now in evidence and a better quality environment will result.

E. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

None of the planned installations will result in irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources. The roads and parking areas could be reclaimed and other facilities could be removed.

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

The site is popular with the public and the installation of the proposed facilities is expected to receive general approval.

V. BENEFITS

The installation of the facilities at the Beartooth State Recreation area will open up a relatively new recreation area. The public has indicated their interest and enjoyment of the area by their activities during the past year. Visitors to the area will enjoy fishing, boating, swimming, camping, and picnicking. The facilities will also be available for hunters in the fall who may wish to use them. There will be general overall benefit and recreational opportunity as a result of the project.

VI. SUMMARY STATEMENT

An analysis of the environmental impact on the site indicates an improvement over the situation that now prevails. Necessary facilities will be installed that will improve and correct impacts and intrusions that are now occurring. Vista sites and scenic values will be enhanced. The public will benefit from the project.