

Program Evaluation

State Parks Division

Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks

ADDENDUM



ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COUNCIL

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Authored by: Hope Stockwell

Management Plans

Management plans direct the long-range development and management of state parks by providing broad policy and program guidance, addressing visitor services, public safety, park operations, recreational opportunities, resource conservation, and education efforts.

The goal is to develop a management plan for each state park as time and resources allow. Since 2000, the DFWP has completed management plans for 15 state parks:

2000

[Chief Plenty Coups](#)

[Lewis and Clark Caverns](#)

2001

[Bannack](#)

[Frenchtown Pond](#)

2002

[Clark's Lookout](#)

2003

[Lone Pine](#)

[Pictograph Cave](#)

2005

[Giant Springs](#)

[Makoshika](#)

2008

[Rosebud Battlefield](#)

2009

[Flathead Lake Islands](#) (Wild Horse, Cedar, Bird, and O'Neil (Douglas) Islands)

[Smith River](#)

2012

[Cooney](#)

2016

[First Peoples Buffalo Jump](#)

[Hell Creek](#)

With a typical shelf life of 10 years, most management plans are outdated. While the DFWP desires to update plans after 10 years, the agency says current conditions and emerging issues may require earlier updates, or some aspects of a plan may remain relevant for a longer period. The DFWP says that the plans are living documents that are periodically reviewed to measure progress.

The state parks program has used some form of management planning since the creation of Lewis and Clark Caverns in the 1930s. Previously, management planning was primarily an "in house" project, completed by staff with consultation of outside entities. Now, the DFWP says the public is involved to a much higher degree, as are stakeholders such as local, county, tribal, and tourism entities. Completing a management plan takes a significant amount of time and resources.

While not all parks currently have comprehensive management plans, they may have weed plans, interpretive plans, site plans, and emergency response plans. The DFWP inventoried existing plans for each park and identified priorities for development of future plans. The [park classification structure](#) adopted by the State Parks and Recreation Board in December 2015 guides future planning.

Forces outside of the Parks Division affect prioritization. The DFWP wrote the management plan for Chief Plenty Coups after the 1999 Legislature determined that the assets there and

at Pictograph Cave were “most at risk and vulnerable” and “must receive immediate priority for preservation and funding.”⁴⁹

The plan included a “guiding vision” to provide:

- a spiritual and educational center to preserve and interpret Chief Plenty Coups’ legacy and Apsaalooke culture;
- a “recreation ground” and place of gathering for all cultures;
- a place, including remnant natural areas, with intact native plant communities; and
- an economic benefit to the Crow Tribe and Pryor Community, providing employment and support to regional economies.

In 2012, the department started a management plan for the Alberton Gorge area of the Clark Fork River and Fish Creek, which the department acquired in 2010. The 2013 [draft plan](#) released says Fish Creek provides a unique opportunity to support a variety of motorized and nonmotorized recreation, including hiking, biking, OHV-riding, picnicking, camping, wildlife viewing, photography, snowshoeing, hunting, and fishing. The park also includes the Williams Peak Lookout, which could offer a rental opportunity for visitors.

Conflicting public comments, issues, and concerns raised during public scoping and comment periods, as well as a shift of DFWP resources to developing an overall strategic plan and classification system for state parks, idled the Fish Creek planning process.

Boots on the Ground

There are 80.87 FTE assigned to serve in state parks. Of those, 64% are permanent positions and the rest are seasonal. Almost 45% of the permanent positions are park managers, 29% are generalists, and 27% are maintenance workers. All of the administrative clerks/assistants (3.92 FTE), tour guides (4.33 FTE), and groundskeepers (13.46 FTE) are seasonal, as is almost a quarter of the maintenance staff (4.63 FTE).

Administering the Land

The Parks Division administers more than 46,000 acres of land. While much of that is owned in fee title, the DFWP also has leases, easements, and “affiliated” lands. Generally, affiliated lands are those that are not actively managed or are managed by other entities.

Leased Lands

While the DFWP owns most of its park land in fee title, it currently leases 4,100 acres through 24 leases and easements that date back to 1957 and provide for all or portions of 16 parks.

Nine of the park easements required one-time payments totaling \$1.4 million. The three most expensive are perpetual recreational easements with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC):

- \$640,000 paid in 2014 for use of 640 acres at Lewis and Clark Caverns;
- \$334,400 paid in 2012 for use of 431 acres at First Peoples Buffalo Jump; and
- \$275,000 paid in 2015 for 34 acres at Thompson Falls. (AVISTA paid for half of the cost of this easement.)

The division currently has eight leases requiring a total of \$31,750 in annual payments for use of 1,230 acres at Big Arm, Madison Buffalo Jump, First Peoples Buffalo Jump, and Smith River sites.

There are five other leases and four easements for 1,707 acres that require no payment.

A full list of the leases is attached.

Affiliated Lands

In addition to state parks, the Parks Division has 11 so-called “affiliated” lands comprising 1,474 acres in its portfolio. The division suspects the designation arose as a holding place for parcels that weren’t a good fit anywhere else in the agency. With the exception of Les Mason, the sites -- listed to the right -- are either not actively managed or are managed by another entity.

The DFWP acquired the sites in different ways between 1938 and 2004. Two were donations; three were part of land exchanges. The Great Falls Shooting Complex resulted from federal actions.

In the late 1980s, the family of then-Governor Ted Schwinden donated Centennial Acre II, the site of his wife Jean’s family homestead northeast of Wolf Point, as part of Montana’s 1989 centennial celebration. A marketing plan encouraged people to buy a small piece of the acre as their ownership in Montana land and to support the celebration.

The DFWP acquired East Gallatin Recreation Area with the intent to develop it as a state park, but the site is now managed by the City of Bozeman.

Affiliated Lands in the Parks Division Portfolio

Les Mason
Little Bitterroot Lake
Alberton Gorge Rec Corridor
Ralph’s Takeout (Alberton Gorge)
Deep Creek
East Gallatin Rec Area
Elk Park Snowmobiling Parking Area
Great Falls Shooting Complex
Wilson Donation
Lake Josephine
Centennial Acre II

Lake Josephine was a possible location for the DFWP's Region 5 headquarters, but the agency used Lake Elmo instead. Lake Josephine is now managed by the City of Billings.

The DFWP says, at this point, disposing of or transferring affiliated lands to another entity would not be simple. The agency says it already resolved the "reasonably easy" affiliated sites, such as transferring the Citadel Rock easement along the Missouri River back to the DNRC and another site (Indian Road) to the Fisheries Division at the DFWP.

Some of the sites are leased, long-term, to their managing entity. The no-cost lease for the Great Falls Shooting Complex does not expire until 2053.

Five⁵⁰ sites have federal encumbrances because the DFWP used Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF) to acquire them. Unlike for Pittman-Robertson and Dingell-Johnson funds, federal law doesn't allow for repayment of LWCF money to resolve an encumbrance. Instead, the agency has to find a property of "reasonably equivalent usefulness and location and of at least equal fair market value" to which the encumbrance could be transferred.⁵¹

Even for sites that are not encumbered, the DFWP says it is required by Article X, Section 11, of the state Constitution to receive fair market value for any property of which it disposes. The DFWP says it is not afforded the flexibility given to DNRC in [77-2-351, MCA](#), to sell land or exchange it for other land or for other consideration with another public entity if determined to be in the state's best interest.

In 2015, Rep. Zach Brown sponsored [House Bill 386](#), seeking to give the DFWP the same flexibility for lands held by the Parks Division. Brown spoke specifically about the East Gallatin Recreation Area and Lake Josephine and their current management by the local communities. The bill did not pass.

⁵⁰ Les Mason, Lake Josephine, Little Bitterroot, Ralph's Takeout, and Deep Creek

⁵¹ [36 CFR 59.3](#)