

Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust

Habitat and Recreational Access Project Grant Application

1. Project Title: Big Arm State Park Public Recreation Access Easement

2. Project Description:

Contingent upon legislative and Montana Land Board approval, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) intends to purchase a permanent recreation easement from the Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC) for Big Arm State Park on Flathead Lake. This easement will provide continued public access at this popular 217 - acre recreation site. Big Arm State Park is located on property that is owned by DNRC and managed to benefit the school trust. Since 1966, FWP has paid an annual lease to DNRC for use of the land where Big Arm State Park has been developed to provide public recreation and lake access. The current annual lease will expire March 1, 2020. The lease payment is expected to increase from the current \$17,505 per annum to as much as \$500,000 annually, as DNRC must begin charging the standard lease rate of 5% of appraised value annually. Due to the escalating cost of the annual lease payment, FWP seeks a permanent easement. A permanent recreation easement will eliminate the annual lease and assure continued public access to Big Arm State Park and Flathead Lake in perpetuity. Big Arm State Park provides critical access to Flathead Lake for boating, fishing, wildlife viewing, camping, and other water-based recreation. Additionally, Big Arm State Park is also the primary departure point for people visiting Wild Horse Island State Park. Wild Horse Island is managed as a primitive state park and provides world class hiking and wildlife viewing opportunities, as it is home to a wealth of wildlife, including a robust population of bighorn sheep.

3. Project Location:

This proposal will take place on property owned by DNRC, located on the West end of Big Arm Bay on Flathead Lake in Lake County, Montana Sections 29 and 30, T24N, R21W. Big Arm State Park is a 217-acre public recreation site that is bordered by private property.

4. Submitted By:

This proposal is being submitted by Montana State Parks Foundation. The primary contact is:

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5. Project Type:

Recreation Access. Permanent Easement on Montana School Trust Land for terrestrial and water-based recreation and access.

6. Management of Properties:

Big Arm State Park will continue to be managed by FWP under the terms and conditions of this easement, while underlying ownership will remain with DNRC. This easement will be modeled after a similar easement held at Thompson Falls State Park, in which DNRC retains rights to utilize the site for other non-conflicting uses but grants full and permanent authorization to FWP to provide public recreation, lake access, and for the development and management of recreation amenities. In return, DNRC will receive a one-time payment equal to the appraised value of the land. These funds will be used to generate interest for the benefit of Montana schools.

7. Size of Project Area:

217 acres

8. Implementation Schedule:

September 2019 (approximate)

9. Total Project Cost:

This permanent easement cost is the appraised value of the land, which is estimated to be \$12 million based on a 2014 appraisal. An updated appraisal will be completed upon Legislative approval.

10. MFWCT Funds:

Montana State Parks Foundation is requesting \$125,000 in 2019 and \$125,000 in 2020 in MTFWCT funds.

11. Matching/Cooperator Funds:

FWP, Montana State Parks Foundation, and other partners will provide the balance, or approximately \$11.75 million in matching/partner funds.

12. Matching/Cooperator Funds:

FWP Funding Source	Contribution
Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)	\$1,900,000
LWCF GOMESA Fund	\$1,100,000
Dingell-Johnson Funds	\$1,500,000
Dingell-Johnson Boating Access Funds	\$177,000
FWP Parks Division Miscellaneous Revenue	\$1,500,000
FWP General License	\$5,573,000
Total	\$11,750,000

13. Project Objective(s):

1. Perpetuate public recreation and camping at Big Arm State Park.
2. Perpetuate public access to Flathead Lake for angling, boating, and water-based recreation.
3. Conserve open space and wildlife habitat at Big Arm State Park.
4. Facilitate public access to Wild Horse Island State Park.

14. Project Strategies:

The single project strategy is to develop diversified funding for the one-time purchase of a permanent public recreation easement that will perpetuate use of this important public recreation and access site.

15. Project Analysis:

The purchase of a permanent easement will allow for the continued public use of one of the most popular units of Montana's state park system. In 2018, visitation to Flathead Lake State Park exceeded 360,000 visits, and the Big Arm Unit generated 43,000 of those visits. Additionally, the campground at Big Arm State Park was the third most reserved campground in Montana's state park system. Over half of all people who visit this park participate in boating, and a minimum of 25% participate in angling. Finally, Big Arm State Park is the primary departure point for Wild Horse Island State Park.

Visitor information regarding access and recreation opportunities will be provided through Montana State Parks Foundation, FWP, Montana State Parks web sites, regional

offices, printed materials, social media, and in cooperation with area chambers of commerce, retail establishments, tourism regions, etc. Big Arm State Park is currently well signed for visitor use, and staff are on duty during busy summer months to assist the public.

16. Existing Project Area Land Management:

FWP has been providing recreation and lake access at Big Arm since 1952 and has held formal lease agreements since 1966. This easement acquisition satisfies DNRC's mandate for generating revenue on trust lands to support Montana's schools, while simultaneously fulfilling the FWP mission of providing public recreation and access.

17. Use of MFWCT Funds:

MFWCT Funds will be used exclusively for the purchase of a permanent public recreation easement at Big Arm State Park.

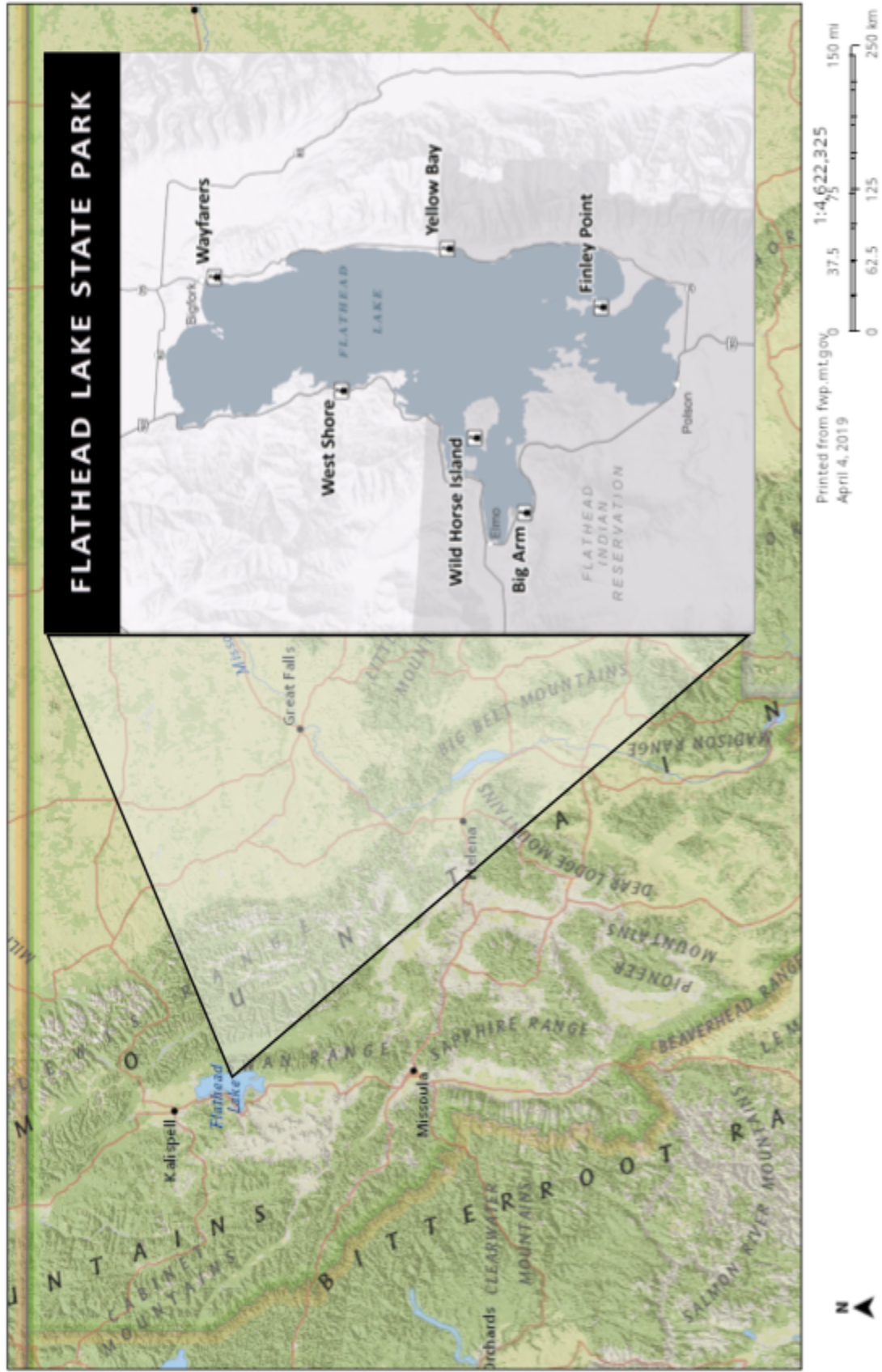
18. Project Monitoring:

The State Parks Division of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will continue to monitor visitor use and satisfaction through established annual visitation collection and user surveys. FWP staff will conduct annual facility and grounds maintenance, including habitat enhancement, and noxious weed control.

19. Additional Comments:

Big Arm State Park provides what is arguably the best boat launching facilities on Flathead Lake. It is one of the only ramps that is suitable for launching when the lake is at low pool, and the ramp and parking facilities are large enough to handle heavy use and large vessels. Approximately \$2.5 million has been invested in recreational amenities at this site over the decades. If FWP is unable to resolve this issue by the lease expiration date on March 1, 2020, the entire site may need to be closed to the public.

BIG ARM STATE PARK VACINITY MAP





BIG ARM AND WILD HORSE ISLAND STATE PARKS

