

**DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

**SPORTSMAN'S BRIDGE FISHING ACCESS**

**FLATHEAD COUNTY, MONTANA**

**May 2026**

**Prepared by:**

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Office of Conservation Investment Region 6 Denver, Colorado**

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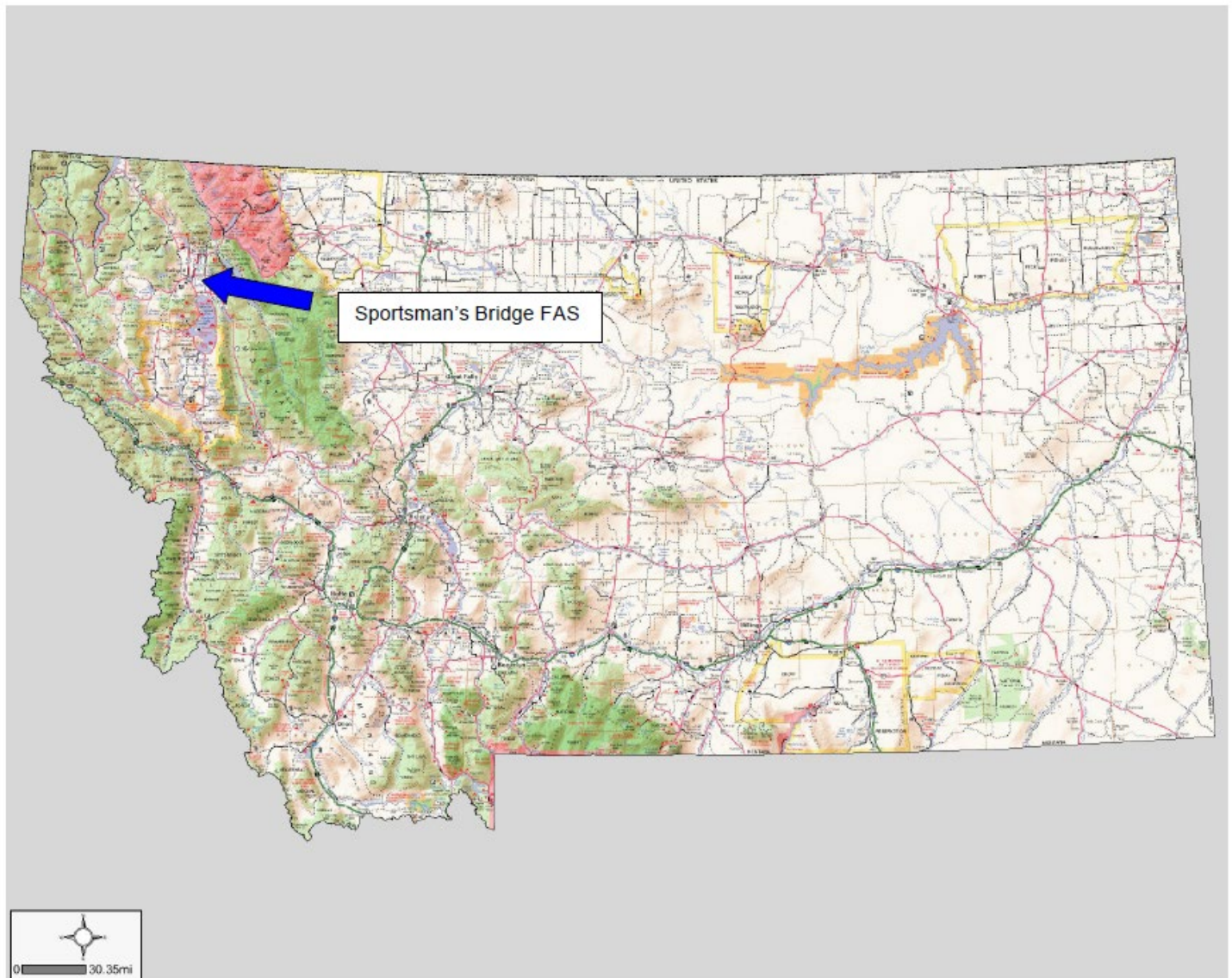
**Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks Helena, Montana**

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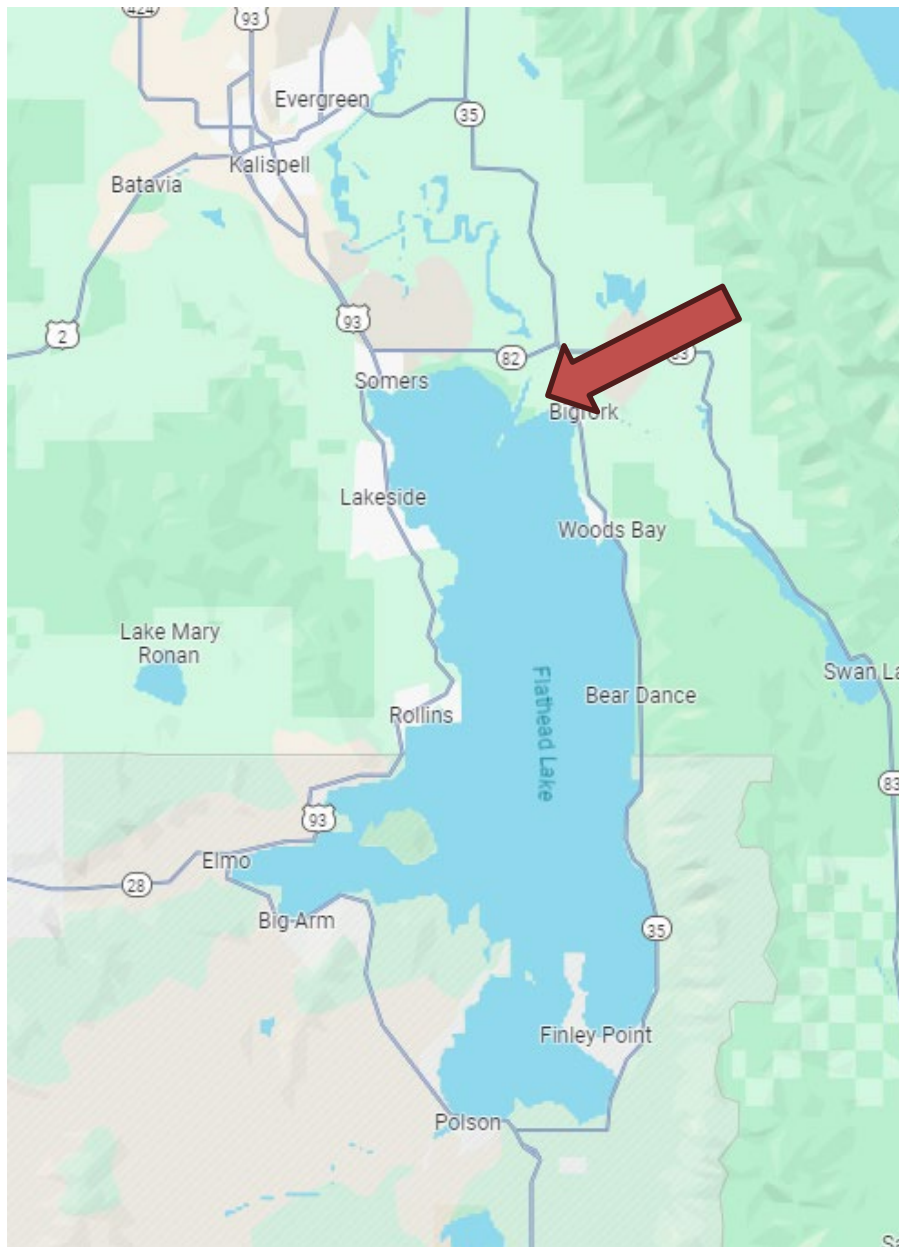
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## PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

Sportsman's Bridge Fishing Access Site (SBFAS) (Figures 1&2) is located just north of Flathead Lake on the east side of the Flathead River, and adjacent to Sportsman's Bridge (on MT Highway 82) in northwest Montana. The site is owned and managed by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) for the purpose of providing boating and fishing access.



**Figure 1.**



**Figure 2. Sportsman's Bridge**

MFWP acquired the 5.4-acre SBFAS in 1959 for the sole purpose of providing a location to establish public boating and fishing access for the Flathead River and Flathead Lake. For this purchase, 75% of the cost was paid with grant funds from the Dingell-Johnson Sport Fish Restoration Program (DJ) administered by the Office of Conservation Investment of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) through Grant No. F-22-L. Because federal funds were used in purchasing this property, the deed for the parcel includes a deed restriction (called an encumbrance) requiring that the site continue to be used for its original authorized purpose in perpetuity. This encumbrance can only be lifted (disposed) with approval from the USFWS.

The SBFAS is currently serving the purposes for which it was acquired; however, the site will be decommissioned to accommodate the required replacement of Sportsman’s Bridge by the Montana Department of Transportation (MDOT). This replacement will include significant widening of the highway approach and associated right-of-way (ROW) at both ends of the bridge. The expanded ROW on the east side of the bridge will prevent public access to the SBFAS

SBFAS is extremely popular with the boating and angling public as it provides crucial access to this northern section of the river and lake. For this reason, MFWP is committed to maintaining uninterrupted public access in this area once the current site is closed.

MFWP acquired a property on the west side of the river to accommodate a new SBFAS and replace the disposed site. (Figure 3). The new site was purchased by MFWP using state-only funds in July of 2024. A federal encumbrance was placed on the new site to support activities consistent with the Sport Fish Restoration grant program in January of 2025.



Figure 3.

USFWS approval to dispose of the federal encumbrance on the current site constitutes a federal action and is subject to the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)<sup>1</sup>, as amended. The USFWS is therefore required to prepare an environmental assessment (EA) based on the procedures for real property disposal to analyze the effects on the environment and document the findings.

The USFWS will use this draft EA and their associated public review process to determine if the proposed action (i.e. disposing of the federal encumbrance) is likely to result in significant impacts to the human environment. If it is determined there are no significant adverse impacts, the USFWS will issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). If significant impacts appear likely to result from the Proposed Action, the USFWS would prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to assess those potential impacts of allowing MFWP to proceed with the disposal.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

### **Proposed Action**

The Proposed Action is to dispose of the federal encumbrance on the deed for the current SBFAS. MFWP will retain title to the site initially and then transfer title to MDOT at some point in the future. The Proposed Action will result in the disposal of real property acquired under a federal award (F-22-L).

The scope of the Proposed Action is limited to disposal of the federal encumbrance on the current location. This will initially result in a net loss of property owned and managed by MFWP or the federal encumbrance acreage on MFWP-owned and managed properties of approximately 5.4-acres. Concurrent with this action, MFWP has acquired property on the opposite side of the river and will develop a new SBFAS that will be federally encumbered.

An appraisal and appraisal review of the current SBFAS site has been prepared in accordance with the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practices (USPAP) and Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions (UASFLA). The appraiser concluded that the current market value of the current site is \$560K.

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<sup>1</sup>

Executive Order 14154, Unleashing American Energy (Jan. 20, 2025), and a Presidential Memorandum, Ending Illegal Discrimination and Restoring Merit-Based Opportunity (Jan. 21, 2025), require the Department to strictly adhere to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq. Further, such Order and Memorandum repeal Executive Orders 12898 (Feb. 11, 1994) and 14096 (Apr. 21, 2023). Because Executive Orders 12898 and 14096 have been repealed, complying with such Orders is a legal impossibility. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service verifies that it has complied with the requirements of NEPA, including the Department's regulations and procedures implementing NEPA at 43 C.F.R. Part 46 and Part 516 of the Departmental Manual, consistent with the President's January 2025 Order and Memorandum. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has also voluntarily considered the Council on Environmental Quality's rescinded regulations implementing NEPA, previously found at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500–1508, as guidance to the extent appropriate and consistent with the requirements of NEPA and Executive Order 14154.

## **No Action**

If no action is taken, MFWP will continue its plan to develop the new SBFAS site, and the federal encumbrance will remain on the current SBFAS property. Once construction is underway to replace Sportsman's Bridge, and access is lost to the current SBFAS by way of the expanded highway right-of-way, MFWP will be in violation of the associated deed restriction and will no longer meet the intended purpose of the original federal award.

## **Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Analysis**

### Acquire alternate access to current site and reconfigure:

Acquiring access through private property adjacent to the existing SBFAS was considered as an option available to MFWP in order to continue to use the existing boating and fishing access site. MDOT initially attempted to secure an access easement on behalf of MFWP for this purpose from the adjacent private property owner; however, this effort proved unsuccessful.

## **AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

### **Location**

The existing 5.4-acre SBFAS is located on the south side of the east end of State Highway 82 where it crosses the Flathead River, just north of Flathead Lake in Flathead County, Montana. The legal description is S23, T27N, R20W, TR 5B IN L2 (48.090835, -114.116744).

### **Recreation**

The existing SBFAS was established in 1959 and accommodates seasonally high use as a recreational access point for both the Flathead River north of Flathead Lake (upper Flathead River) and to Flathead Lake, which is located approximately 2-miles downstream of the new SBFAS that will be completed in the summer of 2025. More specifically, since 2019, recreational use of the existing site has averaged approximately 15,614 vehicle entrances annually. Visitation occurs year-round, but peaks in July and August with approximately 2,500 to 3,000 vehicle entrances during each of those months. Access to the site has always been an issue, as vehicles (mostly with trailers) have to quickly decelerate from a busy highway with no turn lane and then navigate a tight right-angle entrance onto a narrow and somewhat rough single-track dirt road to access this site.

Because the current site will be permanently closed to accommodate construction of a new bridge at this location, MFWP is developing a new, larger boating and fishing access facility on the west side of the river. The new site is larger, and will accommodate expanded parking and trailering areas, plus will be accessed from a quiet secondary road instead of the highway, which will have a turn lane added for the entrance to this road.

### **Wetlands and Floodplains**

Based on the Montana Natural Heritage Program's wetlands mapping system, approximately half of this 5.4-acre site is characterized as Palustrine wetlands, with the largest portions (east of the currently developed areas)

being classed as Palustrine Emergent, Seasonally flooded (PEMC) and Palustrine Forested, Temporarily Flooded (PFOA). A small sections of the site, primarily including portions of the protected boat ramp that were initially excavated is classed as Palustrine Emergent, Intermittently Exposed-Excavated (PEMGx). According to the USGS flood mapping data for this area, most of this site aside from the initial entry road is within the 100-year flood zone.

### **Prime and Unique Farmlands**

According to the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) web soil survey, accessed on August 14, 2024, the existing SBFAS does not contain any prime or unique farmland soils. The NRCS reports are included in Appendix A.

### **Historic and Cultural Resources**

There have been numerous cultural resources studies and reviews conducted over the past 20 years for the area including SBFAS, and no historical or cultural structures or sites have ever been detected aside from the Sportsman's Bridge itself, which is eligible for listing. Most recently, MDOT conducted a survey in 2020 which included a field inspection and review of past surveys. This survey, again, verified no historical or cultural sites or structures for the SBFAS site.

### **Vegetation**

The existing 5.4-acre site is predominately forested in the vicinity of the developed area on the west side of the parcel, with short, woody vegetation interspersed with cottonwood, willow, wild rose, and a variety of other wetland and riparian-associated species dominating the eastern half of the parcel.

### **Wildlife Resources**

The site lies within the riparian corridor of the Flathead River which provides habitat for a variety of species. Common wildlife species likely occurring on and around the area of the existing site include white-tailed deer, muskrat, beaver, Canada goose, wild turkey, pileated woodpecker, bald eagle, osprey, little brown bat, and numerous species of waterfowl, according to the MT Natural Heritage Program species mapper located at: <https://mtnhp.mt.gov/webapps/>

### **Federally Listed Species**

According to a current IPAC species report from the USFWS Ecological Services Division for this area, the location falls within the known range of the following federally listed species:

- Canada Lynx (Threatened)
- Grizzly Bear (Threatened)
- Wolverine (Proposed Threatened)
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo (Threatened)

- Bull Trout (Threatened)
- Monarch Butterfly (Candidate)

MFWP has determined that there will be *no effect* on TEC species indicated for this location. While bull trout are known to occur in other locations in the Flathead River, none of those species have been observed or are known to occur within the area impacted by the proposed action according to the MT Natural Heritage Program species occurrence mapper (<https://mtnhp.mt.gov/webapps/>).

Under the preferred alternative, disposal of the federal encumbrance on the property at this site would result in no impact to Federally listed species. Once the site is transferred to MDOT, it is possible that actions taken by them at this location in the future could impact bull trout; however, all proposed activities would first be vetted by the local USFWS Ecological Services office.

### **State Species of Special Concern**

According to the MT Natural Heritage Program species report for this area, this location falls within the known range of the following state designated species of concern:

#### Mammals

Little Brown Bat  
Long-legged Bat

#### Birds

|                    |                  |                     |
|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Brewer's Sparrow   | Brown Creeper    | Cassin's Finch      |
| Common Tern        | Evening Grosbeak | Great Blue Heron    |
| Lewis's Woodpecker | Pacific Wren     | Pileated Woodpecker |
| Varied Thrush      |                  |                     |

#### Fish

Pygmy Whitefish  
Westslope Cutthroat Trout

For the 2-mile-radius grid covered by the MT Natural Heritage Program species occurrence mapper, there have been no recorded observances for any of these species at the existing SBFAS location, although it is very likely that blue heron would occur on the wetland area on the NE corner of the property.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

### **ALTERNATIVE 1 - PROPOSED ACTION**

The Proposed Action is to dispose of the federal encumbrance on the existing SBFAS property. The scope of the Proposed Action would result in a loss of property acquired under a federal award that was intended to provide ongoing boating and fishing access on the Flathead River. MFWP will transfer title for the 5.4-acre parcel to MDOT, who will permanently close the site and eliminate the entrance road to accommodate the new

highway bridge and approach. Following USFWS approval, MFWP will construct a new SBFAS on the west side of the river to replace the current site and maintain continued public boating and fishing access opportunities.

## **ALTERNATIVE 2 - NO ACTION**

Under the No Action alternative, MFWP would continue to own both the existing SBFAS site as well as the new site on the west side of the river. The federal encumbrance will remain on the deed for the existing site, and ultimately the agency would be in violation of the terms of the encumbrance (requiring perpetual public access for fishing and boating purposes) once the site is closed to accommodate construction of the new bridge, and the property boundary is encroached upon for that purpose.

## **SUMMARY OF ALTERNATIVES**

The following table (Table 1) summarizes impacts to identified resources for both the Preferred Alternative and the No Action alternative.

Table 1 - Summary of Potential Impacts to Identified Impact Topics

| IMPACT TOPIC                           | IMPACTS BY ALTERNATIVE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                        | Proposed Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | No Action                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>RECREATION</b>                      | The Proposed Action is to dispose of the federal encumbrance on the existing SBFAS. Title for this property will be transferred to MDOT, who will close the site permanently to accommodate replacement of the adjacent bridge. Recreational boating and fishing opportunities will cease completely at this site and no longer meet the authorized purpose of the original federal award. | If the federal encumbrance on the current SBFAS should remain, then once the site is closed to accommodate the new highway bridge and associated right-of-way, MFWP would be considered in violation of the associated deed restriction requiring ongoing public boating and fishing access at this site. |
| <b>WETLANDS AND FLOODPLAINS</b>        | The Proposed Action is to dispose of the federal encumbrance in the existing SBFAS. Under the Proposed Action, wetland and floodplain resources would be under the protection of MFWP.                                                                                                                                                                                                     | If the federal encumbrance on the current SBFAS should remain, there would be no impact to floodplains and wetland resources, as no ground-disturbing activities would occur.                                                                                                                             |
| <b>PRIME AND UNIQUE FARMLAND</b>       | The Proposed Action is to dispose of the federal encumbrance on the current SBFAS. Under the preferred alternative there would be no impact to prime and unique farmlands, as none occur on the property.                                                                                                                                                                                  | If the federal encumbrance on the current SBFAS should remain, there would be no impact to prime and unique farmlands, as none occur on the property.                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>HISTORIC AND CULTURAL RESOURCES</b> | The Proposed Action is to dispose of the federal encumbrance on the current SBFAS. Under the preferred alternative there would be no impact to historic and cultural resources, based on a cultural survey that was conducted by MDOT in 2020. This survey concluded that no historic or cultural resources were present on the SBFAS site.                                                | Under a continued federal encumbrance in the existing SBFAS there would be no impact to historic and cultural resources based on a cultural survey that was conducted by MDOT in 2020. This survey concluded that no historic or cultural resources were present on the SBFAS                             |
| <b>VEGETATION RESOURCES</b>            | The Proposed Action is to dispose of the federal encumbrance on the current SBFAS. Under the preferred alternative, vegetation resources would be unaffected. The future MDOT ROW would occur within the existing developed area.                                                                                                                                                          | Under a continued federal encumbrance at the existing SBFAS, there would be no impact to existing vegetation/plant communities.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>WILDLIFE</b>                        | The Proposed Action to dispose of the                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Under a continued federal                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

|                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>RESOURCES</b>                        | federal encumbrance on the existing SBFAS. Under the preferred alternative, wildlife resources would be unaffected since the ROW will occur within the existing developed area.                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | encumbrance on the existing SBFAS, there would be no impact to wildlife resources as no groundbreaking or habitat-altering activities would occur.                                                                                               |
| <b>FEDERALLY LISTED SPECIES</b>         | The Proposed Action is to dispose of the federal encumbrance on the current site. MFWP has determined that grant activities will have <i>no effect</i> on TEC species indicated for this location, as none of those species have been observed or are known to occur within the area impacted by the proposed action. Under the preferred alternative, there would be no impact to Federally listed species. | Under a continued federal encumbrance on SBFAS, there would be no impact to Federally listed species as none are known to occur or have been observed at the site.                                                                               |
| <b>STATE SPECIES OF SPECIAL CONCERN</b> | The Proposed Action is to dispose of the federal encumbrance. Under the preferred alternative, no groundbreaking or habitat-altering activities will occur on the site as a result of the disposal. For this reason, there would be no impact to state species of concern.                                                                                                                                   | Under a continued federal encumbrance on the existing SBFAS there would be no impact to state listed threatened or endangered species, or species of greatest conservation need as no groundbreaking or habitat-altering activities would occur. |

## Reasonably Foreseeable Effects

The purpose of this section is to describe the interaction among the effects of the proposed action and/or action alternatives that are reasonably foreseeable and have a reasonably close casual relationship to the proposed action or action alternatives.

The analysis area represents a landscape surrounding the project area where past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future management actions have occurred or will occur. Known past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions in the geographic area of the project are summarized below:

### **Recreation and Public Use: SBFAS acquisition and anticipated development**

MFWP will develop a new boating access site on the opposite side of the river. The new site will provide expanded parking and trailering availability, more accessible boat-launching facilities, and safer entrance to the site from a secondary road instead of the highway. The new site would be federally encumbered and replace the recreational value of the disposed property.

## **Public Infrastructure: Future MDOT bridge replacement project**

The entrance to the site that is to be eliminated during the highway widening is not within the 100-yr floodplain, and the entrance road is far removed from the wetland area on the site, which will remain intact and undisturbed. MDOT will eliminate the entrance road but otherwise leave the remainder of the site as-is.

Aside from elimination of the entrance road due to the pending highway widening, no groundbreaking or habitat-altering activities will occur on the site as a result of the disposal. For this reason, wildlife resources would be unaffected.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATON**

The USFWS will accept all public comments related to this Proposed Action for (30) thirty days from the date the assessment is published on their website (<https://www.fws.gov/library/collections/office-conservation-investment-nepa-documents>). Additionally, MFWP will post this assessment on their website for the public to view.

## **EA PREPARATION**

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix A – Soils reports for current and new sites

Appendix B – Concurrence notice from the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO)

Appendix C – List of Threatened or Endangered species

Appendix D – MDT Archaeological survey for the site from 2020

## **Appendix A. Soil Reports**



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

NRCS

Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service

A product of the National  
Cooperative Soil Survey,  
a joint effort of the United  
States Department of  
Agriculture and other  
Federal agencies, State  
agencies including the  
Agricultural Experiment  
Stations, and local  
participants

# Custom Soil Resource Report for Upper Flathead Valley Area, Montana

## Sportsman's Bridge 1



October 21, 2024

# Preface

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Soil surveys contain information that affects land use planning in survey areas. They highlight soil limitations that affect various land uses and provide information about the properties of the soils in the survey areas. Soil surveys are designed for many different users, including farmers, ranchers, foresters, agronomists, urban planners, community officials, engineers, developers, builders, and home buyers. Also, conservationists, teachers, students, and specialists in recreation, waste disposal, and pollution control can use the surveys to help them understand, protect, or enhance the environment.

Various land use regulations of Federal, State, and local governments may impose special restrictions on land use or land treatment. Soil surveys identify soil properties that are used in making various land use or land treatment decisions. The information is intended to help the land users identify and reduce the effects of soil limitations on various land uses. The landowner or user is responsible for identifying and complying with existing laws and regulations.

Although soil survey information can be used for general farm, local, and wider area planning, onsite investigation is needed to supplement this information in some cases. Examples include soil quality assessments (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/soils/health/>) and certain conservation and engineering applications. For more detailed information, contact your local USDA Service Center (<https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs>) or your NRCS State Soil Scientist ([http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/contactus/?cid=nrcs142p2\\_053951](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/contactus/?cid=nrcs142p2_053951)).

Great differences in soil properties can occur within short distances. Some soils are seasonally wet or subject to flooding. Some are too unstable to be used as a foundation for buildings or roads. Clayey or wet soils are poorly suited to use as septic tank absorption fields. A high water table makes a soil poorly suited to basements or underground installations.

The National Cooperative Soil Survey is a joint effort of the United States Department of Agriculture and other Federal agencies, State agencies including the Agricultural Experiment Stations, and local agencies. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has leadership for the Federal part of the National Cooperative Soil Survey.

Information about soils is updated periodically. Updated information is available through the NRCS Web Soil Survey, the site for official soil survey information.

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# How Soil Surveys Are Made

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Soil surveys are made to provide information about the soils and miscellaneous areas in a specific area. They include a description of the soils and miscellaneous areas and their location on the landscape and tables that show soil properties and limitations affecting various uses. Soil scientists observed the steepness, length, and shape of the slopes; the general pattern of drainage; the kinds of crops and native plants; and the kinds of bedrock. They observed and described many soil profiles. A soil profile is the sequence of natural layers, or horizons, in a soil. The profile extends from the surface down into the unconsolidated material in which the soil formed or from the surface down to bedrock. The unconsolidated material is devoid of roots and other living organisms and has not been changed by other biological activity.

Currently, soils are mapped according to the boundaries of major land resource areas (MLRAs). MLRAs are geographically associated land resource units that share common characteristics related to physiography, geology, climate, water resources, soils, biological resources, and land uses (USDA, 2006). Soil survey areas typically consist of parts of one or more MLRA.

The soils and miscellaneous areas in a survey area occur in an orderly pattern that is related to the geology, landforms, relief, climate, and natural vegetation of the area. Each kind of soil and miscellaneous area is associated with a particular kind of landform or with a segment of the landform. By observing the soils and miscellaneous areas in the survey area and relating their position to specific segments of the landform, a soil scientist develops a concept, or model, of how they were formed. Thus, during mapping, this model enables the soil scientist to predict with a considerable degree of accuracy the kind of soil or miscellaneous area at a specific location on the landscape.

Commonly, individual soils on the landscape merge into one another as their characteristics gradually change. To construct an accurate soil map, however, soil scientists must determine the boundaries between the soils. They can observe only a limited number of soil profiles. Nevertheless, these observations, supplemented by an understanding of the soil-vegetation-landscape relationship, are sufficient to verify predictions of the kinds of soil in an area and to determine the boundaries.

Soil scientists recorded the characteristics of the soil profiles that they studied. They noted soil color, texture, size and shape of soil aggregates, kind and amount of rock fragments, distribution of plant roots, reaction, and other features that enable them to identify soils. After describing the soils in the survey area and determining their properties, the soil scientists assigned the soils to taxonomic classes (units). Taxonomic classes are concepts. Each taxonomic class has a set of soil characteristics with precisely defined limits. The classes are used as a basis for comparison to classify soils systematically. Soil taxonomy, the system of taxonomic classification used in the United States, is based mainly on the kind and character of soil properties and the arrangement of horizons within the profile. After the soil

scientists classified and named the soils in the survey area, they compared the individual soils with similar soils in the same taxonomic class in other areas so that they could confirm data and assemble additional data based on experience and research.

The objective of soil mapping is not to delineate pure map unit components; the objective is to separate the landscape into landforms or landform segments that have similar use and management requirements. Each map unit is defined by a unique combination of soil components and/or miscellaneous areas in predictable proportions. Some components may be highly contrasting to the other components of the map unit. The presence of minor components in a map unit in no way diminishes the usefulness or accuracy of the data. The delineation of such landforms and landform segments on the map provides sufficient information for the development of resource plans. If intensive use of small areas is planned, onsite investigation is needed to define and locate the soils and miscellaneous areas.

Soil scientists make many field observations in the process of producing a soil map. The frequency of observation is dependent upon several factors, including scale of mapping, intensity of mapping, design of map units, complexity of the landscape, and experience of the soil scientist. Observations are made to test and refine the soil-landscape model and predictions and to verify the classification of the soils at specific locations. Once the soil-landscape model is refined, a significantly smaller number of measurements of individual soil properties are made and recorded. These measurements may include field measurements, such as those for color, depth to bedrock, and texture, and laboratory measurements, such as those for content of sand, silt, clay, salt, and other components. Properties of each soil typically vary from one point to another across the landscape.

Observations for map unit components are aggregated to develop ranges of characteristics for the components. The aggregated values are presented. Direct measurements do not exist for every property presented for every map unit component. Values for some properties are estimated from combinations of other properties.

While a soil survey is in progress, samples of some of the soils in the area generally are collected for laboratory analyses and for engineering tests. Soil scientists interpret the data from these analyses and tests as well as the field-observed characteristics and the soil properties to determine the expected behavior of the soils under different uses. Interpretations for all of the soils are field tested through observation of the soils in different uses and under different levels of management. Some interpretations are modified to fit local conditions, and some new interpretations are developed to meet local needs. Data are assembled from other sources, such as research information, production records, and field experience of specialists. For example, data on crop yields under defined levels of management are assembled from farm records and from field or plot experiments on the same kinds of soil.

Predictions about soil behavior are based not only on soil properties but also on such variables as climate and biological activity. Soil conditions are predictable over long periods of time, but they are not predictable from year to year. For example, soil scientists can predict with a fairly high degree of accuracy that a given soil will have a high water table within certain depths in most years, but they cannot predict that a high water table will always be at a specific level in the soil on a specific date.

After soil scientists located and identified the significant natural bodies of soil in the survey area, they drew the boundaries of these bodies on aerial photographs and

## Custom Soil Resource Report

identified each as a specific map unit. Aerial photographs show trees, buildings, fields, roads, and rivers, all of which help in locating boundaries accurately.

# Soil Map

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The soil map section includes the soil map for the defined area of interest, a list of soil map units on the map and extent of each map unit, and cartographic symbols displayed on the map. Also presented are various metadata about data used to produce the map, and a description of each soil map unit.

# Custom Soil Resource Report Soil Map



# Custom Soil Resource Report

## MAP LEGEND

### Area of Interest (AOI)

 Area of Interest (AOI)

### Soils

 Soil Map Unit Polygons

 Soil Map Unit Lines

 Soil Map Unit Points

### Special Point Features

 Blowout

 Borrow Pit

 Clay Spot

 Closed Depression

 Gravel Pit

 Gravelly Spot

 Landfill

 Lava Flow

 Marsh or swamp

 Mine or Quarry

 Miscellaneous Water

 Perennial Water

 Rock Outcrop

 Saline Spot

 Sandy Spot

 Severely Eroded Spot

 Sinkhole

 Slide or Slip

 Sodic Spot

 Spoil Area

 Stony Spot

 Very Stony Spot

 Wet Spot

 Other

 Special Line Features

### Water Features

 Streams and Canals

### Transportation

 Rails

 Interstate Highways

 US Routes

 Major Roads

 Local Roads

### Background

 Aerial Photography

## MAP INFORMATION

The soil surveys that comprise your AOI were mapped at 1:20,000.

Warning: Soil Map may not be valid at this scale.

Enlargement of maps beyond the scale of mapping can cause misunderstanding of the detail of mapping and accuracy of soil line placement. The maps do not show the small areas of contrasting soils that could have been shown at a more detailed scale.

Please rely on the bar scale on each map sheet for map measurements.

Source of Map: Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Web Soil Survey URL:  
Coordinate System: Web Mercator (EPSG:3857)

Maps from the Web Soil Survey are based on the Web Mercator projection, which preserves direction and shape but distorts distance and area. A projection that preserves area, such as the Albers equal-area conic projection, should be used if more accurate calculations of distance or area are required.

This product is generated from the USDA-NRCS certified data as of the version date(s) listed below.

Soil Survey Area: Upper Flathead Valley Area, Montana  
Survey Area Data: Version 21, Aug 28, 2024

Soil map units are labeled (as space allows) for map scales 1:50,000 or larger.

Date(s) aerial images were photographed: Aug 31, 2021—Oct 12, 2021

The orthophoto or other base map on which the soil lines were compiled and digitized probably differs from the background imagery displayed on these maps. As a result, some minor shifting of map unit boundaries may be evident.

## Map Unit Legend

| Map Unit Symbol                    | Map Unit Name                 | Acres in AOI | Percent of AOI |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Aa                                 | Alluvial land, poorly drained | 7.6          | 99.1%          |
| W                                  | Water                         | 0.1          | 0.9%           |
| <b>Totals for Area of Interest</b> |                               | <b>7.7</b>   | <b>100.0%</b>  |

## Map Unit Descriptions

The map units delineated on the detailed soil maps in a soil survey represent the soils or miscellaneous areas in the survey area. The map unit descriptions, along with the maps, can be used to determine the composition and properties of a unit.

A map unit delineation on a soil map represents an area dominated by one or more major kinds of soil or miscellaneous areas. A map unit is identified and named according to the taxonomic classification of the dominant soils. Within a taxonomic class there are precisely defined limits for the properties of the soils. On the landscape, however, the soils are natural phenomena, and they have the characteristic variability of all natural phenomena. Thus, the range of some observed properties may extend beyond the limits defined for a taxonomic class. Areas of soils of a single taxonomic class rarely, if ever, can be mapped without including areas of other taxonomic classes. Consequently, every map unit is made up of the soils or miscellaneous areas for which it is named and some minor components that belong to taxonomic classes other than those of the major soils.

Most minor soils have properties similar to those of the dominant soil or soils in the map unit, and thus they do not affect use and management. These are called noncontrasting, or similar, components. They may or may not be mentioned in a particular map unit description. Other minor components, however, have properties and behavioral characteristics divergent enough to affect use or to require different management. These are called contrasting, or dissimilar, components. They generally are in small areas and could not be mapped separately because of the scale used. Some small areas of strongly contrasting soils or miscellaneous areas are identified by a special symbol on the maps. If included in the database for a given area, the contrasting minor components are identified in the map unit descriptions along with some characteristics of each. A few areas of minor components may not have been observed, and consequently they are not mentioned in the descriptions, especially where the pattern was so complex that it was impractical to make enough observations to identify all the soils and miscellaneous areas on the landscape.

The presence of minor components in a map unit in no way diminishes the usefulness or accuracy of the data. The objective of mapping is not to delineate pure taxonomic classes but rather to separate the landscape into landforms or landform segments that have similar use and management requirements. The delineation of such segments on the map provides sufficient information for the development of resource plans. If intensive use of small areas is planned, however,

## Custom Soil Resource Report

onsite investigation is needed to define and locate the soils and miscellaneous areas.

An identifying symbol precedes the map unit name in the map unit descriptions. Each description includes general facts about the unit and gives important soil properties and qualities.

Soils that have profiles that are almost alike make up a *soil series*. Except for differences in texture of the surface layer, all the soils of a series have major horizons that are similar in composition, thickness, and arrangement.

Soils of one series can differ in texture of the surface layer, slope, stoniness, salinity, degree of erosion, and other characteristics that affect their use. On the basis of such differences, a soil series is divided into *soil phases*. Most of the areas shown on the detailed soil maps are phases of soil series. The name of a soil phase commonly indicates a feature that affects use or management. For example, Alpha silt loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes, is a phase of the Alpha series.

Some map units are made up of two or more major soils or miscellaneous areas. These map units are complexes, associations, or undifferentiated groups.

A *complex* consists of two or more soils or miscellaneous areas in such an intricate pattern or in such small areas that they cannot be shown separately on the maps. The pattern and proportion of the soils or miscellaneous areas are somewhat similar in all areas. Alpha-Beta complex, 0 to 6 percent slopes, is an example.

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An *undifferentiated group* is made up of two or more soils or miscellaneous areas that could be mapped individually but are mapped as one unit because similar interpretations can be made for use and management. The pattern and proportion of the soils or miscellaneous areas in a mapped area are not uniform. An area can be made up of only one of the major soils or miscellaneous areas, or it can be made up of all of them. Alpha and Beta soils, 0 to 2 percent slopes, is an example.

Some surveys include *miscellaneous areas*. Such areas have little or no soil material and support little or no vegetation. Rock outcrop is an example.

## Upper Flathead Valley Area, Montana

### Aa—Alluvial land, poorly drained

#### Map Unit Setting

*National map unit symbol:* 4vnl  
*Elevation:* 2,000 to 4,800 feet  
*Mean annual precipitation:* 16 to 19 inches  
*Mean annual air temperature:* 37 to 45 degrees F  
*Frost-free period:* 90 to 120 days  
*Farmland classification:* Not prime farmland

#### Map Unit Composition

*Alluvial land and similar soils:* 75 percent  
*Minor components:* 25 percent  
*Estimates are based on observations, descriptions, and transects of the mapunit.*

#### Description of Alluvial Land

##### Typical profile

*H1 - 0 to 20 inches:* silt loam  
*H2 - 20 to 50 inches:* stratified gravelly sandy loam to silty clay loam  
*H3 - 50 to 60 inches:* stratified gravelly loamy sand to coarse sandy loam

##### Properties and qualities

*Slope:* 0 to 4 percent  
*Depth to restrictive feature:* More than 80 inches  
*Drainage class:* Poorly drained  
*Capacity of the most limiting layer to transmit water (Ksat):* Moderately high to high (0.57 to 1.98 in/hr)  
*Depth to water table:* About 18 to 36 inches  
*Frequency of flooding:* Frequent  
*Frequency of ponding:* None  
*Maximum salinity:* Nonsaline to very slightly saline (0.0 to 2.0 mmhos/cm)  
*Available water supply, 0 to 60 inches:* Moderate (about 8.4 inches)

##### Interpretive groups

*Land capability classification (irrigated):* 5w  
*Land capability classification (nonirrigated):* 5w  
*Hydrologic Soil Group:* C  
*Ecological site:* R044AP801MT - Bottomland Group  
*Hydric soil rating:* No

#### Minor Components

##### Poorly drained soils

*Percent of map unit:* 25 percent  
*Landform:* Flood plains  
*Down-slope shape:* Linear  
*Across-slope shape:* Linear  
*Hydric soil rating:* Yes

## **W—Water**

### **Map Unit Composition**

*Water: 100 percent*

*Estimates are based on observations, descriptions, and transects of the mapunit.*

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United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

NRCS

Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Service

A product of the National  
Cooperative Soil Survey,  
a joint effort of the United  
States Department of  
Agriculture and other  
Federal agencies, State  
agencies including the  
Agricultural Experiment  
Stations, and local  
participants

# Custom Soil Resource Report for Upper Flathead Valley Area, Montana

## Sportsman's 2



October 21, 2024

# Preface

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Soil surveys contain information that affects land use planning in survey areas. They highlight soil limitations that affect various land uses and provide information about the properties of the soils in the survey areas. Soil surveys are designed for many different users, including farmers, ranchers, foresters, agronomists, urban planners, community officials, engineers, developers, builders, and home buyers. Also, conservationists, teachers, students, and specialists in recreation, waste disposal, and pollution control can use the surveys to help them understand, protect, or enhance the environment.

Various land use regulations of Federal, State, and local governments may impose special restrictions on land use or land treatment. Soil surveys identify soil properties that are used in making various land use or land treatment decisions. The information is intended to help the land users identify and reduce the effects of soil limitations on various land uses. The landowner or user is responsible for identifying and complying with existing laws and regulations.

Although soil survey information can be used for general farm, local, and wider area planning, onsite investigation is needed to supplement this information in some cases. Examples include soil quality assessments (<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/soils/health/>) and certain conservation and engineering applications. For more detailed information, contact your local USDA Service Center (<https://offices.sc.egov.usda.gov/locator/app?agency=nrcs>) or your NRCS State Soil Scientist ([http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/contactus/?cid=nrcs142p2\\_053951](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/contactus/?cid=nrcs142p2_053951)).

Great differences in soil properties can occur within short distances. Some soils are seasonally wet or subject to flooding. Some are too unstable to be used as a foundation for buildings or roads. Clayey or wet soils are poorly suited to use as septic tank absorption fields. A high water table makes a soil poorly suited to basements or underground installations.

The National Cooperative Soil Survey is a joint effort of the United States Department of Agriculture and other Federal agencies, State agencies including the Agricultural Experiment Stations, and local agencies. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has leadership for the Federal part of the National Cooperative Soil Survey.

Information about soils is updated periodically. Updated information is available through the NRCS Web Soil Survey, the site for official soil survey information.

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# How Soil Surveys Are Made

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Soil surveys are made to provide information about the soils and miscellaneous areas in a specific area. They include a description of the soils and miscellaneous areas and their location on the landscape and tables that show soil properties and limitations affecting various uses. Soil scientists observed the steepness, length, and shape of the slopes; the general pattern of drainage; the kinds of crops and native plants; and the kinds of bedrock. They observed and described many soil profiles. A soil profile is the sequence of natural layers, or horizons, in a soil. The profile extends from the surface down into the unconsolidated material in which the soil formed or from the surface down to bedrock. The unconsolidated material is devoid of roots and other living organisms and has not been changed by other biological activity.

Currently, soils are mapped according to the boundaries of major land resource areas (MLRAs). MLRAs are geographically associated land resource units that share common characteristics related to physiography, geology, climate, water resources, soils, biological resources, and land uses (USDA, 2006). Soil survey areas typically consist of parts of one or more MLRA.

The soils and miscellaneous areas in a survey area occur in an orderly pattern that is related to the geology, landforms, relief, climate, and natural vegetation of the area. Each kind of soil and miscellaneous area is associated with a particular kind of landform or with a segment of the landform. By observing the soils and miscellaneous areas in the survey area and relating their position to specific segments of the landform, a soil scientist develops a concept, or model, of how they were formed. Thus, during mapping, this model enables the soil scientist to predict with a considerable degree of accuracy the kind of soil or miscellaneous area at a specific location on the landscape.

Commonly, individual soils on the landscape merge into one another as their characteristics gradually change. To construct an accurate soil map, however, soil scientists must determine the boundaries between the soils. They can observe only a limited number of soil profiles. Nevertheless, these observations, supplemented by an understanding of the soil-vegetation-landscape relationship, are sufficient to verify predictions of the kinds of soil in an area and to determine the boundaries.

Soil scientists recorded the characteristics of the soil profiles that they studied. They noted soil color, texture, size and shape of soil aggregates, kind and amount of rock fragments, distribution of plant roots, reaction, and other features that enable them to identify soils. After describing the soils in the survey area and determining their properties, the soil scientists assigned the soils to taxonomic classes (units). Taxonomic classes are concepts. Each taxonomic class has a set of soil characteristics with precisely defined limits. The classes are used as a basis for comparison to classify soils systematically. Soil taxonomy, the system of taxonomic classification used in the United States, is based mainly on the kind and character of soil properties and the arrangement of horizons within the profile. After the soil

scientists classified and named the soils in the survey area, they compared the individual soils with similar soils in the same taxonomic class in other areas so that they could confirm data and assemble additional data based on experience and research.

The objective of soil mapping is not to delineate pure map unit components; the objective is to separate the landscape into landforms or landform segments that have similar use and management requirements. Each map unit is defined by a unique combination of soil components and/or miscellaneous areas in predictable proportions. Some components may be highly contrasting to the other components of the map unit. The presence of minor components in a map unit in no way diminishes the usefulness or accuracy of the data. The delineation of such landforms and landform segments on the map provides sufficient information for the development of resource plans. If intensive use of small areas is planned, onsite investigation is needed to define and locate the soils and miscellaneous areas.

Soil scientists make many field observations in the process of producing a soil map. The frequency of observation is dependent upon several factors, including scale of mapping, intensity of mapping, design of map units, complexity of the landscape, and experience of the soil scientist. Observations are made to test and refine the soil-landscape model and predictions and to verify the classification of the soils at specific locations. Once the soil-landscape model is refined, a significantly smaller number of measurements of individual soil properties are made and recorded. These measurements may include field measurements, such as those for color, depth to bedrock, and texture, and laboratory measurements, such as those for content of sand, silt, clay, salt, and other components. Properties of each soil typically vary from one point to another across the landscape.

Observations for map unit components are aggregated to develop ranges of characteristics for the components. The aggregated values are presented. Direct measurements do not exist for every property presented for every map unit component. Values for some properties are estimated from combinations of other properties.

While a soil survey is in progress, samples of some of the soils in the area generally are collected for laboratory analyses and for engineering tests. Soil scientists interpret the data from these analyses and tests as well as the field-observed characteristics and the soil properties to determine the expected behavior of the soils under different uses. Interpretations for all of the soils are field tested through observation of the soils in different uses and under different levels of management. Some interpretations are modified to fit local conditions, and some new interpretations are developed to meet local needs. Data are assembled from other sources, such as research information, production records, and field experience of specialists. For example, data on crop yields under defined levels of management are assembled from farm records and from field or plot experiments on the same kinds of soil.

Predictions about soil behavior are based not only on soil properties but also on such variables as climate and biological activity. Soil conditions are predictable over long periods of time, but they are not predictable from year to year. For example, soil scientists can predict with a fairly high degree of accuracy that a given soil will have a high water table within certain depths in most years, but they cannot predict that a high water table will always be at a specific level in the soil on a specific date.

After soil scientists located and identified the significant natural bodies of soil in the survey area, they drew the boundaries of these bodies on aerial photographs and

## Custom Soil Resource Report

identified each as a specific map unit. Aerial photographs show trees, buildings, fields, roads, and rivers, all of which help in locating boundaries accurately.

# Soil Map

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The soil map section includes the soil map for the defined area of interest, a list of soil map units on the map and extent of each map unit, and cartographic symbols displayed on the map. Also presented are various metadata about data used to produce the map, and a description of each soil map unit.

# Custom Soil Resource Report Soil Map



# Custom Soil Resource Report

## MAP LEGEND

### Area of Interest (AOI)

 Area of Interest (AOI)

### Soils

 Soil Map Unit Polygons

 Soil Map Unit Lines

 Soil Map Unit Points

### Special Point Features

 Blowout

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 Sodic Spot

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 Stony Spot

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## Map Unit Legend

| Map Unit Symbol                    | Map Unit Name                                | Acres in AOI | Percent of AOI |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Sr                                 | Swims silty clay loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes | 22.8         | 100.0%         |
| <b>Totals for Area of Interest</b> |                                              | <b>22.8</b>  | <b>100.0%</b>  |

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Some surveys include *miscellaneous areas*. Such areas have little or no soil material and support little or no vegetation. Rock outcrop is an example.

## Upper Flathead Valley Area, Montana

### Sr—Swims silty clay loam, 0 to 4 percent slopes

#### Map Unit Setting

*National map unit symbol:* 4vsr  
*Elevation:* 2,600 to 3,400 feet  
*Mean annual precipitation:* 15 to 18 inches  
*Mean annual air temperature:* 39 to 45 degrees F  
*Frost-free period:* 100 to 120 days  
*Farmland classification:* Prime farmland if irrigated

#### Map Unit Composition

*Swims and similar soils:* 90 percent  
*Minor components:* 10 percent  
*Estimates are based on observations, descriptions, and transects of the mapunit.*

#### Description of Swims

##### Setting

*Landform:* Terraces  
*Down-slope shape:* Linear  
*Across-slope shape:* Linear  
*Parent material:* Alluvium

##### Typical profile

*Oi - 0 to 1 inches:* slightly decomposed plant material  
*E - 1 to 5 inches:* silty clay loam  
*Bw - 5 to 12 inches:* silty clay loam  
*Bk - 12 to 26 inches:* silt loam  
*C1 - 26 to 55 inches:* stratified very fine sandy loam to silty clay loam  
*2C2 - 55 to 60 inches:* loamy fine sand

##### Properties and qualities

*Slope:* 0 to 4 percent  
*Depth to restrictive feature:* More than 80 inches  
*Drainage class:* Moderately well drained  
*Capacity of the most limiting layer to transmit water (Ksat):* Moderately high to high  
(0.20 to 5.95 in/hr)  
*Depth to water table:* About 48 inches  
*Frequency of flooding:* None  
*Frequency of ponding:* None  
*Calcium carbonate, maximum content:* 15 percent  
*Maximum salinity:* Nonsaline to very slightly saline (0.0 to 3.0 mmhos/cm)  
*Available water supply, 0 to 60 inches:* High (about 10.1 inches)

##### Interpretive groups

*Land capability classification (irrigated):* 3e  
*Land capability classification (nonirrigated):* 3e  
*Hydrologic Soil Group:* A  
*Ecological site:* R044AP808MT - Upland Grassland Group  
*Hydric soil rating:* No

**Minor Components**

**Nonhydric**

*Percent of map unit:* 8 percent

*Hydric soil rating:* No

**Poorly drained soils**

*Percent of map unit:* 2 percent

*Landform:* Channels

*Down-slope shape:* Linear

*Across-slope shape:* Linear

*Hydric soil rating:* Yes

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- United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. National range and pasture handbook. <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/landuse/rangepasture/?cid=stelprdb1043084>

## Custom Soil Resource Report

United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. National soil survey handbook, title 430-VI. [http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/scientists/?cid=nrcs142p2\\_054242](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/scientists/?cid=nrcs142p2_054242)

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## **Appendix B – Concurrence notice from the State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO)**



August 15, 2025

Grace Bello  
US Fish and Wildlife Service – National Wildlife Refuge System – Region 6.  
PO Box 25486 Denver Federal Center, Denver Colorado 80225

Re: Sportsman's Bridge Boating Access EA & Disposal Notification. MTSHP0: 20250731010

Dear Grace,

Thank you for your letter and associated materials (received July 29, 2025) regarding the proposed Sportsman's Bridge Boating Access Disposal in Flathead County. We concur with your determination of *No Historic Properties Effected*.

Please note that our concurrence does not substitute for a good faith effort to consult with interested parties, local government authorities, and American Indian tribes. If you receive a comment that substantially relates to a historic property located within or adjacent to the Area of Potential Effect, please submit it to our office for review. Include documentation of how the comment was addressed. If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to contact me at (406) 444-7719 or [RJ.Hillman@mt.gov](mailto:RJ.Hillman@mt.gov). Thank you for consulting with us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads 'Robert Hillman'.

RJ Hillman M.A.  
Compliance Officer  
Montana State Historic Preservation Office

## **Appendix C – List of Threatened or Endangered species**



## United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Montana Ecological Services Field Office  
585 Shephard Way, Suite 1  
Helena, MT 59601-6287  
Phone: (406) 449-5225 Fax: (406) 449-5339



In Reply Refer To:  
Project Code: 2023-0069401  
Project Name: Sportsman's Bridge FAS Right-of-Way easement

April 14, 2023

Subject: List of threatened and endangered species that may occur in your proposed project location or may be affected by your proposed project

### To Whom It May Concern:

The enclosed species list identifies threatened, endangered, proposed and candidate species, as well as proposed and final designated critical habitat, that may occur within the boundary of your proposed project and/or may be affected by your proposed project. The species list fulfills the requirements of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) under section 7(c) of the Endangered Species Act (Act) of 1973, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

New information based on updated surveys, changes in the abundance and distribution of species, changed habitat conditions, or other factors could change this list. Please feel free to contact us if you need more current information or assistance regarding the potential impacts to federally proposed, listed, and candidate species and federally designated and proposed critical habitat. Please note that under 50 CFR 402.12(e) of the regulations implementing section 7 of the Act, the accuracy of this species list should be verified after 90 days. This verification can be completed formally or informally as desired. The Service recommends that verification be completed by visiting the ECOS-IPaC website at regular intervals during project planning and implementation for updates to species lists and information. An updated list may be requested through the ECOS-IPaC system by completing the same process used to receive the enclosed list.

The purpose of the Act is to provide a means whereby threatened and endangered species and the ecosystems upon which they depend may be conserved. Under sections 7(a)(1) and 7(a)(2) of the Act and its implementing regulations (50 CFR 402 *et seq.*), Federal agencies are required to utilize their authorities to carry out programs for the conservation of threatened and endangered species and to determine whether projects may affect threatened and endangered species and/or designated critical habitat.

A Biological Assessment is required for construction projects (or other undertakings having similar physical impacts) that are major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment as defined in the National Environmental Policy Act (42 U.S.C. 4332(2) (c)). For projects other than major construction activities, the Service suggests that a biological

evaluation similar to a Biological Assessment be prepared to determine whether the project may affect listed or proposed species and/or designated or proposed critical habitat. Recommended contents of a Biological Assessment are described at 50 CFR 402.12.

If a Federal agency determines, based on the Biological Assessment or biological evaluation, that listed species and/or designated critical habitat may be affected by the proposed project, the agency is required to consult with the Service pursuant to 50 CFR 402. In addition, the Service recommends that candidate species, proposed species and proposed critical habitat be addressed within the consultation. More information on the regulations and procedures for section 7 consultation, including the role of permit or license applicants, can be found in the "Endangered Species Consultation Handbook" at:

<http://www.fws.gov/endangered/esa-library/pdf/TOC-GLOS.PDF>

**Migratory Birds:** In addition to responsibilities to protect threatened and endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), there are additional responsibilities under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA) to protect native birds from project-related impacts. Any activity, intentional or unintentional, resulting in take of migratory birds, including eagles, is prohibited unless otherwise permitted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (50 C.F.R. Sec. 10.12 and 16 U.S.C. Sec. 668(a)). For more information regarding these Acts see <https://www.fws.gov/birds/policies-and-regulations.php>.

The MBTA has no provision for allowing take of migratory birds that may be unintentionally killed or injured by otherwise lawful activities. It is the responsibility of the project proponent to comply with these Acts by identifying potential impacts to migratory birds and eagles within applicable NEPA documents (when there is a federal nexus) or a Bird/Eagle Conservation Plan (when there is no federal nexus). Proponents should implement conservation measures to avoid or minimize the production of project-related stressors or minimize the exposure of birds and their resources to the project-related stressors. For more information on avian stressors and recommended conservation measures see <https://www.fws.gov/birds/bird-enthusiasts/threats-to-birds.php>.

In addition to MBTA and BGEPA, Executive Order 13186: *Responsibilities of Federal Agencies to Protect Migratory Birds*, obligates all Federal agencies that engage in or authorize activities that might affect migratory birds, to minimize those effects and encourage conservation measures that will improve bird populations. Executive Order 13186 provides for the protection of both migratory birds and migratory bird habitat. For information regarding the implementation of Executive Order 13186, please visit <https://www.fws.gov/birds/policies-and-regulations/executive-orders/e0-13186.php>.

We appreciate your concern for threatened and endangered species. The Service encourages Federal agencies to include conservation of threatened and endangered species into their project planning to further the purposes of the Act. Please include the Consultation Code in the header of this letter with any request for consultation or correspondence about your project that you submit to our office.

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Attachment(s):

- Official Species List
  - USFWS National Wildlife Refuges and Fish Hatcheries
  - Migratory Birds
  - Wetlands
-

## OFFICIAL SPECIES LIST

This list is provided pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, and fulfills the requirement for Federal agencies to "request of the Secretary of the Interior information whether any species which is listed or proposed to be listed may be present in the area of a proposed action".

This species list is provided by:

**Montana Ecological Services Field Office**

585 Shephard Way, Suite 1

Helena, MT 59601-6287

(406) 449-5225

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## PROJECT SUMMARY

Project Code: 2023-0069401  
Project Name: Sportsman's Bridge FAS Right-of-Way easement  
Project Type: Easement / Right-of-Way  
Project Description: Issue a ROW easement to the MT Department of Transportation to accommodate bridge replacement.

Project Location:

The approximate location of the project can be viewed in Google Maps: <https://www.google.com/maps/@48.09225375,-114.11220090606953,14z>



Counties: Flathead County, Montana

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## ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT SPECIES

There is a total of 6 threatened, endangered, or candidate species on this species list.

Species on this list should be considered in an effects analysis for your project and could include species that exist in another geographic area. For example, certain fish may appear on the species list because a project could affect downstream species.

IPaC does not display listed species or critical habitats under the sole jurisdiction of NOAA Fisheries<sup>1</sup>, as USFWS does not have the authority to speak on behalf of NOAA and the Department of Commerce.

See the "Critical habitats" section below for those critical habitats that lie wholly or partially within your project area under this office's jurisdiction. Please contact the designated FWS office if you have questions.

- 
1. [NOAA Fisheries](#), also known as the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), is an office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration within the Department of Commerce.

## MAMMALS

| NAME                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | STATUS                 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Canada Lynx <i>Lynx canadensis</i><br>Population: Wherever Found in Contiguous U.S.<br>There is <b>final</b> critical habitat for this species. Your location does not overlap the critical habitat.<br>Species profile: <a href="https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/3652">https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/3652</a>                | Threatened             |
| Grizzly Bear <i>Ursus arctos horribilis</i><br>Population: U.S.A., conterminous (lower 48) States, except where listed as an experimental population<br>There is <b>proposed</b> critical habitat for this species.<br>Species profile: <a href="https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/7642">https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/7642</a> | Threatened             |
| North American Wolverine <i>Gulo gulo luscus</i><br>No critical habitat has been designated for this species.<br>Species profile: <a href="https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/5123">https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/5123</a>                                                                                                       | Proposed<br>Threatened |

## BIRDS

| NAME                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | STATUS     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Yellow-billed Cuckoo <i>Coccyzus americanus</i><br>Population: Western U.S. DPS<br>There is <b>final</b> critical habitat for this species. Your location does not overlap the critical habitat.<br>Species profile: <a href="https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/3911">https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/3911</a> | Threatened |

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## FISHES

| NAME                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | STATUS     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Bull Trout <i>Salvelinus confluentus</i><br>Population: U.S.A., conterminous, lower 48 states<br>There is <b>final</b> critical habitat for this species. Your location does not overlap the critical habitat.<br>Species profile: <a href="https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/8212">https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/8212</a> | Threatened |

## INSECTS

| NAME                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | STATUS    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| Monarch Butterfly <i>Danaus plexippus</i><br>No critical habitat has been designated for this species.<br>Species profile: <a href="https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/9743">https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/9743</a> | Candidate |

## CRITICAL HABITATS

THERE ARE NO CRITICAL HABITATS WITHIN YOUR PROJECT AREA UNDER THIS OFFICE'S JURISDICTION.

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## **USFWS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE LANDS AND FISH HATCHERIES**

Any activity proposed on lands managed by the [National Wildlife Refuge](#) system must undergo a 'Compatibility Determination' conducted by the Refuge. Please contact the individual Refuges to discuss any questions or concerns.

THERE ARE NO REFUGE LANDS OR FISH HATCHERIES WITHIN YOUR PROJECT AREA.

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# MIGRATORY BIRDS

Certain birds are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act<sup>1</sup> and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act<sup>2</sup>.

Any person or organization who plans or conducts activities that may result in impacts to migratory birds, eagles, and their habitats should follow appropriate regulations and consider implementing appropriate conservation measures, as described [below](#).

- 
1. The [Migratory Birds Treaty Act](#) of 1918.
  2. The [Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act](#) of 1940.
  3. 50 C.F.R. Sec. 10.12 and 16 U.S.C. Sec. 668(a)

**The birds listed below are birds of particular concern either because they occur on the [USFWS Birds of Conservation Concern \(BCC\)](#) list or warrant special attention in your project location.** To learn more about the levels of concern for birds on your list and how this list is generated, see the FAQ [below](#). This is not a list of every bird you may find in this location, nor a guarantee that every bird on this list will be found in your project area. To see exact locations of where birders and the general public have sighted birds in and around your project area, visit the [E-bird data mapping tool](#) (Tip: enter your location, desired date range and a species on your list). For projects that occur off the Atlantic Coast, additional maps and models detailing the relative occurrence and abundance of bird species on your list are available. Links to additional information about Atlantic Coast birds, and other important information about your migratory bird list, including how to properly interpret and use your migratory bird report, can be found [below](#).

For guidance on when to schedule activities or implement avoidance and minimization measures to reduce impacts to migratory birds on your list, click on the PROBABILITY OF PRESENCE SUMMARY at the top of your list to see when these birds are most likely to be present and breeding in your project area.

| NAME                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | BREEDING SEASON         |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Bald Eagle <i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i></b><br>This is not a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) in this area, but warrants attention because of the Eagle Act or for potential susceptibilities in offshore areas from certain types of development or activities. | Breeds Jan 1 to Aug 31  |
| <b>Black Tern <i>Chlidonias niger</i></b><br>This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.<br><a href="https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/3093">https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/3093</a>                           | Breeds May 15 to Aug 20 |

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| NAME                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | BREEDING SEASON         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Bobolink <i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i></b><br>This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Breeds May 20 to Jul 31 |
| <b>California Gull <i>Larus californicus</i></b><br>This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Breeds Mar 1 to Jul 31  |
| <b>Cassin's Finch <i>Carpodacus cassinii</i></b><br>This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.<br><a href="https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/9462">https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/9462</a>                                                                                                            | Breeds May 15 to Jul 15 |
| <b>Evening Grosbeak <i>Coccothraustes vespertinus</i></b><br>This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.                                                                                                                                                                                                | Breeds May 15 to Aug 10 |
| <b>Franklin's Gull <i>Leucophaeus pipixcan</i></b><br>This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Breeds May 1 to Jul 31  |
| <b>Golden Eagle <i>Aquila chrysaetos</i></b><br>This is not a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) in this area, but warrants attention because of the Eagle Act or for potential susceptibilities in offshore areas from certain types of development or activities.<br><a href="https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/1680">https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/1680</a> | Breeds Jan 1 to Aug 31  |
| <b>Lesser Yellowlegs <i>Tringa flavipes</i></b><br>This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.<br><a href="https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/9679">https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/9679</a>                                                                                                             | Breeds elsewhere        |
| <b>Lewis's Woodpecker <i>Melanerpes lewis</i></b><br>This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.<br><a href="https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/9408">https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/9408</a>                                                                                                           | Breeds Apr 20 to Sep 30 |
| <b>Olive-sided Flycatcher <i>Contopus cooperi</i></b><br>This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.<br><a href="https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/3914">https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/3914</a>                                                                                                       | Breeds May 20 to Aug 31 |
| <b>Rufous Hummingbird <i>selasphorus rufus</i></b><br>This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.<br><a href="https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/8002">https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/8002</a>                                                                                                          | Breeds Apr 15 to Jul 15 |
| <b>Western Grebe <i>aechmophorus occidentalis</i></b><br>This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska.<br><a href="https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/6743">https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/species/6743</a>                                                                                                       | Breeds Jun 1 to Aug 31  |

| NAME                                                                                                                                            | BREEDING SEASON        |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Willet <i>Tringa semipalmata</i></b><br>This is a Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC) throughout its range in the continental USA and Alaska. | Breeds Apr 20 to Aug 5 |

## PROBABILITY OF PRESENCE SUMMARY

The graphs below provide our best understanding of when birds of concern are most likely to be present in your project area. This information can be used to tailor and schedule your project activities to avoid or minimize impacts to birds. Please make sure you read and understand the FAQ "Proper Interpretation and Use of Your Migratory Bird Report" before using or attempting to interpret this report.

### Probability of Presence (■)

Each green bar represents the bird's relative probability of presence in the 10km grid cell(s) your project overlaps during a particular week of the year. (A year is represented as 12 4-week months.) A taller bar indicates a higher probability of species presence. The survey effort (see below) can be used to establish a level of confidence in the presence score. One can have higher confidence in the presence score if the corresponding survey effort is also high.

How is the probability of presence score calculated? The calculation is done in three steps:

1. The probability of presence for each week is calculated as the number of survey events in the week where the species was detected divided by the total number of survey events for that week. For example, if in week 12 there were 20 survey events and the Spotted Towhee was found in 5 of them, the probability of presence of the Spotted Towhee in week 12 is 0.25.
2. To properly present the pattern of presence across the year, the relative probability of presence is calculated. This is the probability of presence divided by the maximum probability of presence across all weeks. For example, imagine the probability of presence in week 20 for the Spotted Towhee is 0.05, and that the probability of presence at week 12 (0.25) is the maximum of any week of the year. The relative probability of presence on week 12 is  $0.25/0.25 = 1$ ; at week 20 it is  $0.05/0.25 = 0.2$ .
3. The relative probability of presence calculated in the previous step undergoes a statistical conversion so that all possible values fall between 0 and 10, inclusive. This is the probability of presence score.

### Breeding Season (■)

Yellow bars denote a very liberal estimate of the time-frame inside which the bird breeds across its entire range. If there are no yellow bars shown for a bird, it does not breed in your project area.

### Survey Effort (|)

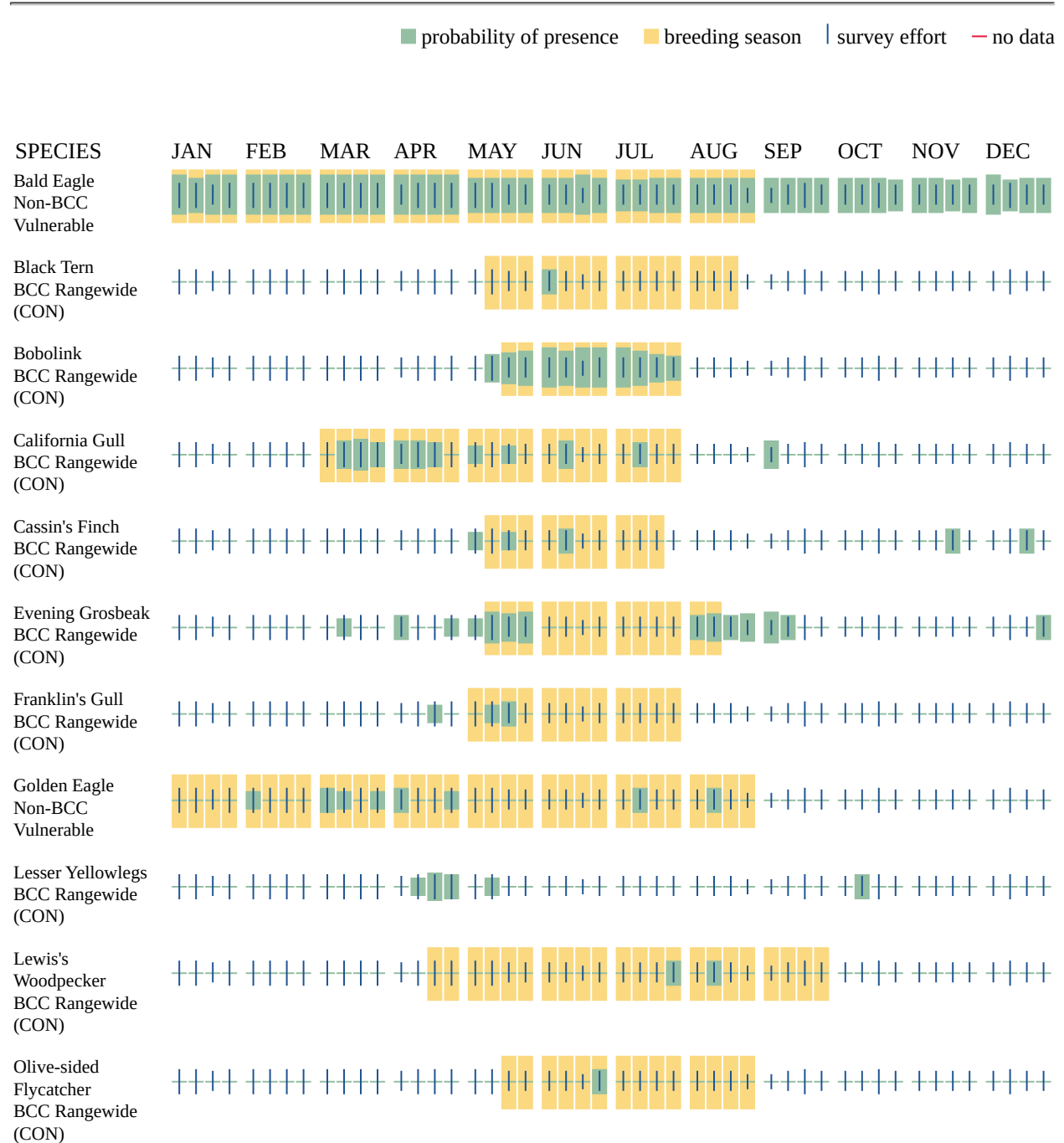
Vertical black lines superimposed on probability of presence bars indicate the number of surveys performed for that species in the 10km grid cell(s) your project area overlaps. The number of surveys is expressed as a range, for example, 33 to 64 surveys.

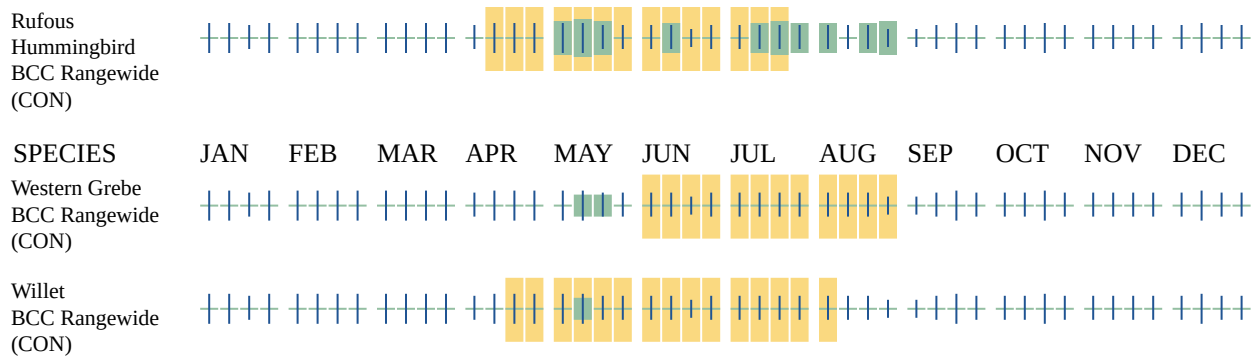
**No Data (—)**

A week is marked as having no data if there were no survey events for that week.

## Survey Timeframe

Surveys from only the last 10 years are used in order to ensure delivery of currently relevant information. The exception to this is areas off the Atlantic coast, where bird returns are based on all years of available data, since data in these areas is currently much more sparse.





Additional information can be found using the following links:

- Birds of Conservation Concern <https://www.fws.gov/program/migratory-birds/species>
- Measures for avoiding and minimizing impacts to birds <https://www.fws.gov/library/collections/avoiding-and-minimizing-incident-take-migratory-birds>
- Nationwide conservation measures for birds <https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/nationwide-standard-conservation-measures.pdf>

## MIGRATORY BIRDS FAQ

**Tell me more about conservation measures I can implement to avoid or minimize impacts to migratory birds.**

[Nationwide Conservation Measures](#) describes measures that can help avoid and minimize impacts to all birds at any location year round. Implementation of these measures is particularly important when birds are most likely to occur in the project area. When birds may be breeding in the area, identifying the locations of any active nests and avoiding their destruction is a very helpful impact minimization measure. To see when birds are most likely to occur and be breeding in your project area, view the Probability of Presence Summary. [Additional measures](#) or [permits](#) may be advisable depending on the type of activity you are conducting and the type of infrastructure or bird species present on your project site.

**What does IPaC use to generate the list of migratory birds that potentially occur in my specified location?**

The Migratory Bird Resource List is comprised of USFWS [Birds of Conservation Concern \(BCC\)](#) and other species that may warrant special attention in your project location.

The migratory bird list generated for your project is derived from data provided by the [Avian Knowledge Network \(AKN\)](#). The AKN data is based on a growing collection of [survey, banding, and citizen science datasets](#) and is queried and filtered to return a list of those birds reported as occurring in the 10km grid cell(s) which your project intersects, and that have been identified as warranting special attention because they are a BCC species in that area, an eagle ([Eagle Act](#) requirements may apply), or a species that has a particular vulnerability to offshore activities or development.

Again, the Migratory Bird Resource list includes only a subset of birds that may occur in your project area. It is not representative of all birds that may occur in your project area. To get a list of all birds potentially present in your project area, please visit the [Rapid Avian Information Locator \(RAIL\) Tool](#).

### **What does IPaC use to generate the probability of presence graphs for the migratory birds potentially occurring in my specified location?**

The probability of presence graphs associated with your migratory bird list are based on data provided by the [Avian Knowledge Network \(AKN\)](#). This data is derived from a growing collection of [survey, banding, and citizen science datasets](#).

Probability of presence data is continuously being updated as new and better information becomes available. To learn more about how the probability of presence graphs are produced and how to interpret them, go to the Probability of Presence Summary and then click on the "Tell me about these graphs" link.

### **How do I know if a bird is breeding, wintering or migrating in my area?**

To see what part of a particular bird's range your project area falls within (i.e. breeding, wintering, migrating or year-round), you may query your location using the [RAIL Tool](#) and look at the range maps provided for birds in your area at the bottom of the profiles provided for each bird in your results. If a bird on your migratory bird species list has a breeding season associated with it, if that bird does occur in your project area, there may be nests present at some point within the timeframe specified. If "Breeds elsewhere" is indicated, then the bird likely does not breed in your project area.

### **What are the levels of concern for migratory birds?**

Migratory birds delivered through IPaC fall into the following distinct categories of concern:

1. "BCC Rangewide" birds are [Birds of Conservation Concern](#) (BCC) that are of concern throughout their range anywhere within the USA (including Hawaii, the Pacific Islands, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands);
2. "BCC - BCR" birds are BCCs that are of concern only in particular Bird Conservation Regions (BCRs) in the continental USA; and
3. "Non-BCC - Vulnerable" birds are not BCC species in your project area, but appear on your list either because of the [Eagle Act](#) requirements (for eagles) or (for non-eagles) potential susceptibilities in offshore areas from certain types of development or activities (e.g. offshore energy development or longline fishing).

Although it is important to try to avoid and minimize impacts to all birds, efforts should be made, in particular, to avoid and minimize impacts to the birds on this list, especially eagles and BCC species of rangewide concern. For more information on conservation measures you can implement to help avoid and minimize migratory bird impacts and requirements for eagles, please see the FAQs for these topics.

### **Details about birds that are potentially affected by offshore projects**

For additional details about the relative occurrence and abundance of both individual bird species and groups of bird species within your project area off the Atlantic Coast, please visit the [Northeast Ocean Data Portal](#). The Portal also offers data and information about other taxa besides

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birds that may be helpful to you in your project review. Alternately, you may download the bird model results files underlying the portal maps through the [NOAA NCCOS Integrative Statistical Modeling and Predictive Mapping of Marine Bird Distributions and Abundance on the Atlantic Outer Continental Shelf](#) project webpage.

Bird tracking data can also provide additional details about occurrence and habitat use throughout the year, including migration. Models relying on survey data may not include this information. For additional information on marine bird tracking data, see the [Diving Bird Study](#) and the [nanotag studies](#) or contact [Caleb Spiegel](#) or [Pam Loring](#).

### **What if I have eagles on my list?**

If your project has the potential to disturb or kill eagles, you may need to [obtain a permit](#) to avoid violating the Eagle Act should such impacts occur.

### **Proper Interpretation and Use of Your Migratory Bird Report**

The migratory bird list generated is not a list of all birds in your project area, only a subset of birds of priority concern. To learn more about how your list is generated, and see options for identifying what other birds may be in your project area, please see the FAQ "What does IPaC use to generate the migratory birds potentially occurring in my specified location". Please be aware this report provides the "probability of presence" of birds within the 10 km grid cell(s) that overlap your project; not your exact project footprint. On the graphs provided, please also look carefully at the survey effort (indicated by the black vertical bar) and for the existence of the "no data" indicator (a red horizontal bar). A high survey effort is the key component. If the survey effort is high, then the probability of presence score can be viewed as more dependable. In contrast, a low survey effort bar or no data bar means a lack of data and, therefore, a lack of certainty about presence of the species. This list is not perfect; it is simply a starting point for identifying what birds of concern have the potential to be in your project area, when they might be there, and if they might be breeding (which means nests might be present). The list helps you know what to look for to confirm presence, and helps guide you in knowing when to implement conservation measures to avoid or minimize potential impacts from your project activities, should presence be confirmed. To learn more about conservation measures, visit the FAQ "Tell me about conservation measures I can implement to avoid or minimize impacts to migratory birds" at the bottom of your migratory bird trust resources page.

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## WETLANDS

Impacts to [NWI wetlands](#) and other aquatic habitats may be subject to regulation under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, or other State/Federal statutes.

For more information please contact the Regulatory Program of the local [U.S. Army Corps of Engineers District](#).

Please note that the NWI data being shown may be out of date. We are currently working to update our NWI data set. We recommend you verify these results with a site visit to determine the actual extent of wetlands on site.

### FRESHWATER FORESTED/SHRUB WETLAND

- [PSS1C](#)
- [PFO1A](#)

### RIVERINE

- [R3UBH](#)

### FRESHWATER EMERGENT WETLAND

- [PEM1C](#)
-

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## **Appendix D – MDT Archaeological survey for the site from 2020**

**Flathead River Bridge Replacement,  
3 Miles Northwest of Bigfork:  
A Cultural Resource Inventory**



*project overview*

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Flathead River Bridge Replacement,  
3 Miles Northwest of Bigfork:  
A Cultural Resource Inventory

by

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Montana Department of Transportation  
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January 28, 2020

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## INTRODUCTION

Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) intends to replace the Flathead River Bridge on Montana Highway 82 located 3 miles northwest of Bigfork. The project will address increasing traffic volume and the bridge's narrow deck. Proposed work will involve placing the new bridge on a parallel alignment immediately south of the existing bridge, plus construction of approaches at either end that will tie the new bridge to a section of reconstructed highway. Building the new bridge to the south of the existing will impact the Sportsman's Bridge Fishing Access Site on the east bank of the Flathead River. As a consequence, the fishing access site will be re-built on the same land parcel with a new boat ramp and additional parking. Access to it will be moved from Highway 82 to Hanging Rock Drive, at the intersection of which turn lanes will be added. The entire project along Highway 82 will be 1.4 miles long. Construction is expected to begin in 2022.

The affected parcel is in Sections 14, 22, and 23, Township 27 North, Range 20 West just north of the upper end of Flathead Lake in the upper Flathead Valley. The Area of Potential Effect width is variable to accommodate the new bridge alignment and numerous other anticipated improvements along the project length (Figure 1).

MDT contracted with Mitzi Rossillon, Consulting Archaeologist, LLC to conduct a cultural resource inventory of the 75-acre project area. This report documents the field investigation, while also providing an environmental context and a listing of methodologies employed. No cultural resources were identified.

## ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

The Flathead River bisects the project area and discharges into Flathead Lake about 2¼ miles downstream (south).

On the west side of the Flathead River, the project corridor transects the level surface of a glacial outwash plain north of the Flathead River delta. This area is currently used for growing agricultural crops. On the east side of the river, the terrain is more broken. From the east end of the bridge, the road extends across the river's flood plain and a low-lying terrace then ascends at a steep angle through a natural defile at the end of a prominent Precambrian bedrock outcrop—one of many [that] rise above the level surface of the surrounding plain. East of the river, the terraces directly adjacent to the river contain dense stands of riparian vegetation (native cottonwood and willow, dogwood, wild rose and a variety of forbs). Much of the land adjacent to the fishing access site south of the bridge is inundated seasonally, resulting in a large expanse of cattail marsh. In contrast, the bedrock outcrops farther east contain stands of coniferous forest, punctuated by open meadows [Caywood 2011:1].

Project soils are dominated by four types. Alluvial land is on the east side of the bridge, comprising most of the soil within and adjacent to the existing fishing access site. It consists of

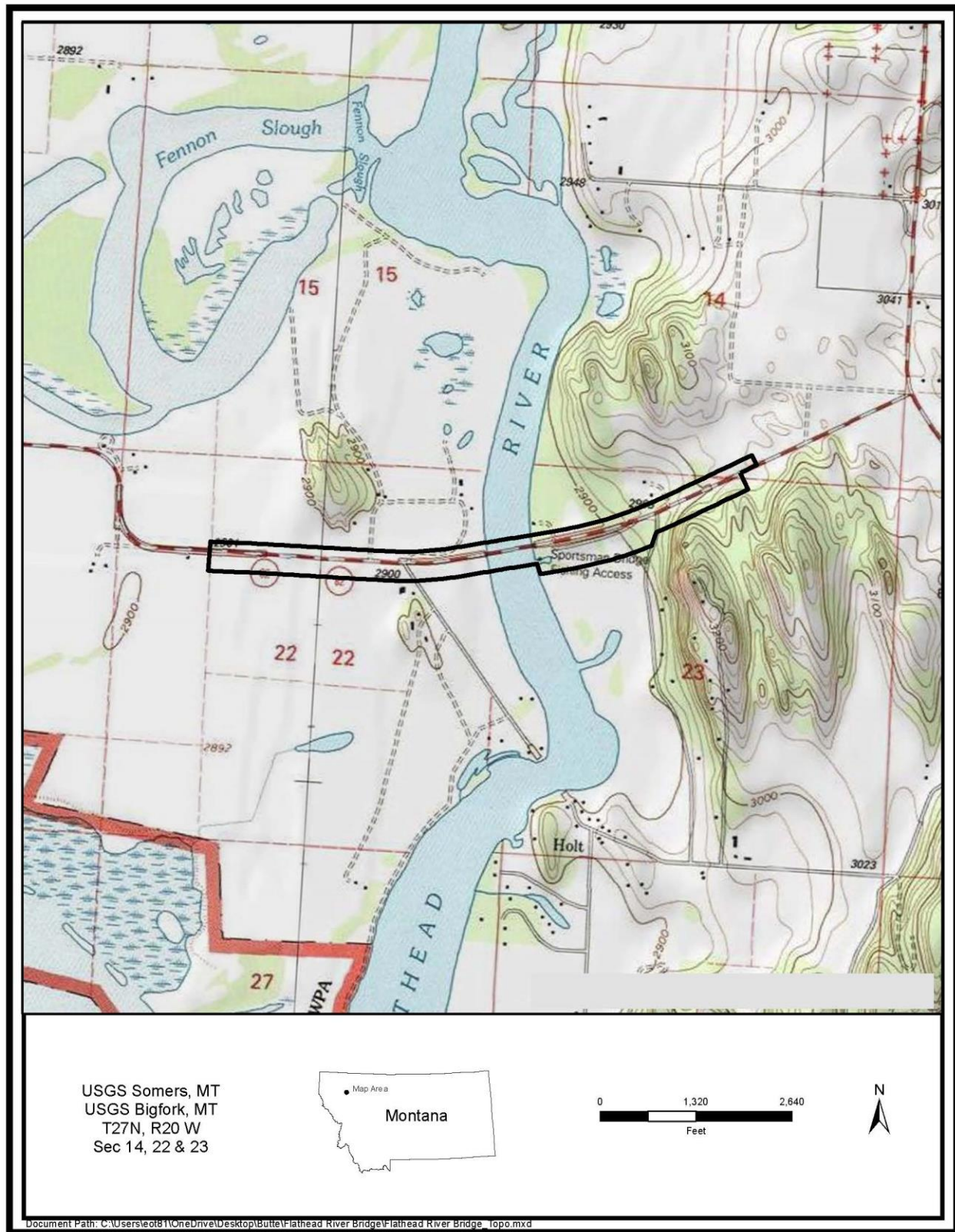


Figure 1. Portion of area topographic map showing location of project area/  
cultural resource inventory area.

poorly drained stratified gravelly sandy loam and silty clay loam. Much of it is within the river's floodplain where the water table is 18-36 inches below the ground surface (Figure 2). Farther to the east and also on the west side of the river is Swims silty clay loam. Found on river terraces, this alluvium is moderately well drained with the water table at about 4 feet. Near the east end of the project area is mountainous land (Figure 3). This consists of loam grading to gravelly silt loam and gravelly loam. The well-drained soil is high above the water table. Lastly, at the far west end of the project area is Flathead very fine sandy loam that formed in alluvium. It occupies a river terrace and is well drained (Figure 4; Natural Resource Conservation Service 2020).



Figure 2. Floodplain in southeast quadrant of project area, with Flathead River in background, facing west-southwest. Cattails are yellow-tan vegetation at center. Fishing access site road is at center, and Montana Highway 82 at far right, top of berm.

Ground visibility was poor in three of the four quadrants of the inventory area. Despite the fact that the author conducted the survey late in the season, there was only a skiff of snow on the ground during the second day of survey (on the east half of the project). Poor visibility is instead attributed to dense ground cover. The exception was in the southwest quadrant where the ground had been disced and most crop stubble removed. Elsewhere, occasional views of mineral soil were along the Flathead River cut bank and in rodent burrows in existing highway right of way.



Figure 3. Bedrock outcrop in southeast quadrant toward east end of project, with river floodplain in foreground, facing east.



Figure 4. View of southwest quadrant, showing cultivated field, facing west.

## METHODOLOGIES

### File Search Results

The Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) conducted a file search for cultural resource inventory reports and previously recorded sites in the project vicinity. Five inventories covered portions of the current project. In 1978, a crew from the University of Montana Anthropology Department examined a 1-acre parcel at the Sportsman's Bridge Fishing Access Site where the boat launch was to be lengthened and where an entry sign was to be placed (Taylor 1978). Eight years later, Steve Aaberg inventoried the planned location of a new access road to the fishing access site. His work covered the road alignment, existing parking area and boat ramp, and a swath along the Flathead River (Aaberg 1986). In 1989, Gary McLean inventoried a new access road for the US Fish and Wildlife Service that lays at the west edge of the current project, in the southwest quadrant (McLean 1989). In all three of these cases, no sites were found.

Two inventories examined the entire length of the current bridge replacement and highway reconstruction project. Thirty years ago, GCM Services inventoried archaeological and historic sites along Montana Highway 82 from its intersection with US Highway 93 on the west to Montana Highway 35 on the east for a total of 6.9 miles. The 400-foot-wide inventory area covered the majority of the current project width. The crew failed to identify any sites within the present area of interest (Decco 1989:1-3). Janene Caywood conducted a file search and a field review of standing architecture within the current bridge replacement project area in mid-2011. She identified no new sites (Caywood 2011:5).

Finally, in 1997, Jon Axline updated the site form for the Flathead River Bridge (24FH517) that is the focus of the bridge replacement/ highway reconstruction project. He determined that the steel girder bridge built in 1955 is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C. It is significant for its association with the statewide post-World War II highway construction boom. It is also an intact example of the standard two-girder bridge type that the Montana Highway Commission employed widely from about 1945 to the early 1960s (Axline 1997).

### Field Methodology

On December 1 and 2, 2019, the author of this report conducted the required fieldwork. She accomplished the archaeological inventory using parallel transects averaging 30 meters apart, although there was some meandering due to uneven and steep terrain and some tree fall in the east half of the area examined. The steepest areas where bedrock was exposed in the southeast quadrant were not walked. Neither were most of the residential parcels in the northeast quadrant near the Flathead River. In that area, however, the author walked existing driveways and lanes, which were the only locations where there was cleared ground surface (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Residential area in northeast quadrant near bridge, showing thick vegetation compared to cleared lane/driveway with improved ground visibility; facing west

## INVENTORY RESULTS

The cultural resource inventory of the project area identified no new archaeological or historic sites or isolated finds. This result is consistent with reports of all previous investigations within and adjacent to the project area.

It seems unlikely that significant cultural resources went undetected during the 2019 inventory. Tilling and highway right-of-way maintenance in the west portion of the project area has apparently removed any evidence of previous occupation there. On the opposite (east) side of the bridge, the floodplain and farther east the steep rocky terrain is thought to have been unsuitable for anything but temporary occupation across most of the southeast quadrant. In the northeast quadrant, while it seems that precontact and historic occupation was possible, 1950s highway construction and modern residential development have probably removed or buried evidence of such activity.

## SUMMARY

The Montana Department of Transportation contracted with Mitzi Rossillon, Consulting Archaeologist, LLC to conduct a cultural resource inventory of the proposed Flathead River Bridge replacement and highway reconstruction project 3 miles northwest of Big Fork along Montana Highway 82. The author examined a total of 75 acres. There are no precontact or historic sites in the project area, with the exception of the Flathead River Bridge (24FH517) that is National Register eligible under Criteria A and C.

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