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Bissell, Gael
Draft
environmental
analysis (ea) for
the Morris Island
purchase

**DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS (EA) FOR THE
MORRIS ISLAND PURCHASE**

***A Proposed Project for the Riparian/Wetland Conservation Program,
a Part of Fish, Wildlife & Parks Wildlife Mitigation Program
for Hungry Horse Dam***

April 9, 1997

STATE DOCUMENTS COLLECTION

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Figure 2. Location of the Morris proposed project area and adjacent public lands.

APPENDICES

- Appendix A. Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Report by Teresa Kinley: Age Review and Ownership Status of Morris Island, Flathead River, MT. (without photos).
- Appendix B. Proposed Draft Management Plan, Morris Island.
- Appendix C. Wildlife species expected to occur on the Morris island based on data collected at the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area and adjoining areas (D. Casey and others, FWP, unpublished data).
- Appendix D. Morris Island Socio-Economic Assessment.

PART I. DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

A. PROPOSED ACTION

The Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) is proposing to purchase approximately 40 acres of a 58 acre island located at the junction of the Stillwater and Flathead Rivers southeast of Kalispell, Montana (Sections 22 and 27, Township 28 North, Range 21 West.) (Figs. 1 & 2). The proposed purchase would meet the goals of FWP's Riparian/Wetland Conservation Program, an element of FWP's Wildlife Mitigation Program for Hungry Horse Dam, and utilize interest from the Wildlife Mitigation Trust Fund. The proposed project is adjacent to the previously proposed Coriell Island project pursued by FWP as part of the Riparian/Wetland Conservation Program in 1995 (Fig. 2). Although FWP had issued a Decision Notice (FWP 1996) with the intent to purchase the 73 acres on Coriell Island, pending final FWP Commission Review, the final purchase is awaiting Department of Natural Resources (DNRC) clearance of their claim to title to the Coriell project area. DNRC has completed their review of the Morris Island project area and determined they have no claim to title (Appendix A). The portion of Morris Island being considered for purchase is privately owned. The remaining 18 acres are owned by U.S. Forest Service, Flathead National Forest (FNF). This remaining parcel is part of a proposed land exchange between FNF and FWP (Fig. 2).

The Morris property is dominated by a mature riparian/wetland forest which has had a minimum of direct human disturbance. Dominant overstory species are black cottonwood (Populus trichocarpa) and spruce (probably Picea engelmannii). The understory is dominated by riparian shrubs and herbaceous species. No human developments have been observed on the property. Recreation is the primary land use.

FWP has negotiated a purchase price for Morris based on recent appraisals of river islands and lands, a nearby recent sale, and timber/recreational values. FWP is proposing to purchase approximately 40 acres owned by the Morris family for \$55,000 or \$1,375 per acre. The project would result in 40 acres of wildlife mitigation credit.

B. AUTHORITIES AND DIRECTION

FWP is mandated by public law (87-1-201) to protect, enhance, and regulate the wise use of Montana's fish and wildlife resources for public benefit now and in the future. Recently, the FWP Commission adopted Habitat Montana policy and plan (FWP 1995a) which calls for FWP to focus conservation efforts on "intermountain grassland, shrub grassland, and riparian ecosystems".

In addition, the Northwest Power Act of 1980 (P.L. 96-501) authorized the creation of the Northwest Power Planning and Conservation Council (NPPC) and charged it with developing a program to "protect, mitigate and enhance fish and wildlife affected by the development, operation and management" of the federal hydropower system in the Columbia River Basin. Under the Northwest Power Act, the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and FWP established an agreement that provided funds from BPA for the protection, mitigation and enhancement of wildlife and wildlife habitat affected by the development of Libby and Hungry Horse Dams. This Settlement Agreement was signed in 1988; payments to the Wildlife Mitigation Trust Fund were

Figure 1. Location of the Morris proposed project area in the Flathead River Valley.

Figure 2. Location of the Morris proposed project area and adjacent public lands.

completed in 1994. This preliminary project proposal was reviewed and unanimously approved by the Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Commission in May 1996. The proposed project was also reviewed and unanimously supported by the Wildlife Mitigation Advisory Committee (WMAC) members on April 11, 1996. WMAC is the group established by the Settlement Agreement to provide recommendations and guidance to FWP on implementation of mitigation activities.

C. PURPOSE AND NEED OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The primary purpose of this acquisition is to insure conservation of the riparian and wetland habitat resources of the island as a means to mitigate for some of the 6,400 acres of riparian and wetlands lost due to construction of Hungry Horse Dam. Because the Morris island adjoins other public lands and is within a popular recreation corridor along the Flathead River mainstem (Fig. 2), the project would result in the securing of public recreation values as well. The parcel would be managed as part of FWP's Wildlife Habitat Protection Area Program with primary management emphasis on habitat values and secondary focus on recreation values. A proposed management plan for the site is attached in Appendix B.

D. PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

The Morris property occupies most of an island within the main channels of the Flathead River (island on right side of cover photo). The property is comprised of both riparian and wetland habitats in nearly pristine condition. The dominant overstory consists of mature cottonwood and spruce, a dense understory of deciduous shrubs, younger spruce trees, and many types of herbaceous communities typical of river systems. The island contains a few backwater channels. The island lies between the highly active or "delta" section of the Flathead River and its confluence with the Stillwater River. At this confluence, the Flathead River becomes a wide, single channel, meandering river system. The highly braided channel area around the Morris Island is caused by the change in gradient between the upper and lower Flathead River systems.

The lower portion of the Flathead River from Flathead Lake up to this braided river section is influenced by Kerr dam. The operation of Kerr Dam maintains higher than normal water levels in the Flathead River mainstem during the summer months. One can see both the erosional aspects of the higher water levels on the lower part of the island and the depositional effects on the upper end of the island.

The dynamic and unpredictable nature of this river section has helped maintain this island's relatively undisturbed nature. As a result, Morris Island supports some of the best and last examples of undisturbed mature and old growth riparian forest and high quality riparian habitats within the entire upper Flathead mainstem corridor. Historical photos from 1937 to present indicate the island has changed in configuration and size over time probably due to both natural events and to the influence of Kerr Dam. Based on existing trends, the island appears to be gradually eroding along the steeper channel banks (southeast and northwest) and building at the northeast and south points.

The Morris Island is adjacent to various types of public and private lands (Fig. 2). The Flathead National Forest (FNF) owns approximately 18 acres on the north end of Morris Island and another small parcel on Leisure Island west of Morris. FNF is in the process of exchanging their Flathead

River tracts to FWP. Northeast of Morris, along Brenneman's Slough, another 12.7 acres of riparian forest has been donated to FWP. DNRC owns approximately 442 acres of state land upstream of the proposed project which is currently leased to the Flathead Audubon Society as the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area. This tract is the state's first and only designated state natural area. In 1995, FWP agreed to purchase approximately 73 acres of the Coriell Island directly northwest of Morris from the Flathead Land Trust. This project is awaiting determination by DNRC to their claim to all or a portion of this island. Finally, Flathead County Parks and Recreation owns an undeveloped 89 acre parcel on Leisure Island northwest of Morris (Fig. 2).

E. VALUES OF PROPERTY

1. Wildlife

The Morris property provides year-round habitat for numerous game species including white-tailed deer, turkey, pheasants, ruffed grouse, a variety of waterfowl, beaver, river otter, mink, and muskrat. In fact, the proximity of this braided section to downstream sloughs, Brenneman's slough, the Stillwater River, and the island character make it some of the best river otter habitat in Montana. It is located within a river section which supports a high density of beaver (2 colonies per channel mile). It provides foraging habitat for great blue herons and double crested cormorants which have rookeries located just to the east of the island. Active nests of osprey occur along the edge of the island in old cottonwood snags. This island is consistently used by migratory and wintering bald eagles. The large diameter trees and snags provides excellent nesting and brood rearing habitat for cavity nesting ducks such as wood ducks, common and hooded mergansers, Barrows and common goldeneyes. Canada geese nest in osprey platforms, on old snags, and on the ground. The dense vegetation also provides excellent nesting cover for mallards. The island's wetland habitats support western toads and painted turtles. A wildlife species list based on surveys of the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area and adjacent habitats (Appendix C) is indicative of the wildlife diversity and importance of this habitat.

2. Fisheries

In addition to wildlife values, the aquatic habitat provides excellent foraging and cover habitat for a large number of migratory and resident fisheries. Most notable is the importance the Flathead mainstem for migratory adult and juvenile bull trout, a species recently consider "warranted " for listing as a threatened and endangered species by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and west slope cutthroat trout, a species of special concern in Montana. (The proposed final status for bull trout is expected by August 15, 1997). Both these species use the gravel bars, overhanging banks, and channels for foraging and cover during their migrations.

3. Recreation

The island has traditionally been used for fishing, picnicking, bird watching, deer hunting, upland game bird hunting and waterfowl hunting. The land has not been posted in the past.

4. Mitigation Credit

Fee-title acquisition of this property would result in 40 acres of mitigation credit for riparian/wetlands according to crediting policies described in FWP's Final Programmatic EIS on the Riparian/Wetland Conservation Program (FWP 1995b).

F. THREATS

Although no development has occurred in the past, the landowner has been approached by buyers to sell this island (and other nearby lands) for cabin, private recreation, and house boat docking sites. The landowner has also planned to log the spruce and cottonwood at various times in the past. If the property stayed in private ownership, one or more of these land uses is likely to occur.

G. MANAGEMENT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The draft management plan (Appendix B) for Morris Island calls for inclusion of this parcel in the FWP's Wildlife Division Wildlife Habitat Protection Area program. Wildlife Habitat Protection Areas are small parcels of land, often donated to FWP, with exemplary or special wildlife values. They are managed primarily for their wildlife habitat values and only secondarily for their recreation values. The island may also meet the criteria of the State Natural Areas Program. The potential for including the Morris property into the Natural Areas Program, particularly with the Owen Sowerwine Natural Area located just northwest, would be evaluated during implementation of this management plan.

As stated in the Draft Management Plan, the management goal for Morris is: "to protect and maintain the riparian/wetland values and special wildlife uses associated with this island property and to allow recreation uses which do not undermine or impact these natural values". This management plan would not exclude recreation rights guaranteed under the stream access laws or other recreational laws.

PART II. DESCRIPTION OF REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES

A. No Action Alternative

If FWP does not purchase the private tract on Morris Island, the private landowner will sell to another private entity. Land use on the major portion of the island could change. Habitat values would be altered if timber is harvested or human developments are added. Visual impacts associated with human developments would increase. Public recreational opportunities may be foreclosed. In addition, FWP would lose the opportunity to utilize the Riparian/Wetland Conservation program to meet mitigation goals.

B. DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND DISMISSED

1. Purchase of a Conservation Easement

Purchase of a conservation easement is not an option for the private landowners.

2. Purchase Conservation Easement from next landowners

No other conservation group has the funds to purchase this island. If sold on the private market, most buyers would probably want the island for some type of personal gain: timber, cabin site, private recreation ground, or some type of commercial adventure. Under this scenario, FWP would have a more difficult time negotiating conservation easement terms which maximize the wildlife values of the island. In addition, there is no guarantee that the new landowner(s) would be interested in working with FWP. The fact that the island is not presently used and functions as a wildlife refuge makes purchase the best option.

3. Lease:

The landowners have no interest in leasing the island.

PART III. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

A. EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. Land Resources:

Proposed Action: The proposed action would result in long-term protection of the island's land resources such as soil, wetlands, gravel bars, and sandbars from impacts associated with human development. Land uses which might negatively impact land resources such as sand and gravel mining or vegetation removal would be precluded under FWP ownership. The land resources would continue to be impacted by river-related processes such as erosion and deposition.

No Action: This Alternative could possibly result in the loss of the land resource values in the future. Land resources, particularly stream banks, could be impacted by timber operations, sand and gravel removal (low probability), local disturbances related to construction of cabins, shelters or boat docks, or domestic livestock grazing (low probability).

2. Air Resources:

Proposed Action: No impact expected.

No Action: No impact expected.

3. Water Resources:

Proposed Action: The Proposed Action will help maintain long-term protection of Flathead River surface and ground water quality. No developments or land uses which would decrease bank stability or lead to increased erosion rates (above normal rates which are already occurring) would be implemented.

No Action: Activities which are most likely to occur under this Alternative include commercial timber harvest and shelter/cabin/dock construction. These activities may negatively impact water quality through disturbance of vegetation and stream banks. In the long term, other activities which could possibly occur, although with a low probability, include sand or gravel excavation and livestock grazing could significantly impact water quality.

4. Vegetation Resources:

Proposed Action: The proposed action should provide long-term protection for native riparian and wetland plant communities and their changes over time. Native plant communities include cottonwood and spruce forest, riparian shrublands supporting willow (*Salix* spp.), red-osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*), hawthorn (*Crataegus* spp.),

snowberry (Symphoricarpos albus), and herbaceous communities consisting of various sedges (Carex spp.), cattail (Typha latifolia), cow parsnip (Heracleum lanatum) and other riparian species. The existing infestation of Canadian thistle (Cirsium arvense), a noxious weed, poses a unique management problem as mechanical means of eradication would be difficult, chemical means could pose environmental risks, and biological control could be ineffective in areas subject to annual flooding. A suitable and safe means of Canadian thistle management (as well as other noxious weeds should they become established) would be part of FWP's management responsibility. Noxious weed management is addressed in the draft management plan. (Appendix B).

No Action: This Alternative could lead to degradation of vegetation resources through changes in land use such as commercial timber harvest, construction of shelters or cabins, or mineral extraction, or grazing activities. Increase land disturbances (including flooding) increases likelihood of noxious weed infestations. Weed management would be the responsibility of the next landowner.

5. Fish/Wildlife Resources:

Proposed Action: The Proposed Action would help maintain existing and future important aquatic plant and invertebrates communities which, in turn, provide food and cover for a variety of fish and other aquatic mammals which utilize these habitats. Fish species which would benefit from long-term habitat protection include migratory juvenile and adult bull trout, west-slope cutthroat trout, and mountain whitefish. Other resident native fish which use the Flathead mainstem and braided section include squawfish, peamouth, and large-scale sucker. Nonnative fish species such as rainbow trout, lake trout, and Lake Superior whitefish utilize the gravel bars, backwater and main channels of the Flathead River around this island. Maintenance of existing vegetation provides bank stability, shade and cover as well as future vegetative and organic material which provides nutrients, cover, and substrate for aquatic plant and animal communities.

The river banks and backwater channels would continue to provide breeding and foraging habitat for native amphibians and reptiles such as western toads and painted turtles while the riparian vegetation would continue to support a number common snakes such as common and western garter snakes. The proposed project would maintain high quality foraging and nesting habitats for great blue herons, double crested cormorants, osprey, bald eagles, wood ducks, goldeneyes, mergansers, pileated woodpeckers, chickadees and other cavity nesting birds (Appendix C). The dense ground vegetation would also continue to provide nesting habitat for upland game birds such as ruffed grouse, wild turkey, and pheasants as well as upland nesting waterfowl such as Canada geese and mallard ducks. The forest canopy will continue to support a variety of deciduous forest or spruce forest neo-tropical migrants such as warblers, swallows, vireos, and thrushes, many of which are in decline.

In addition, the Proposed Action would continue to maintain year-round habitat for white-tailed deer. The aquatic and riparian habitats would continue to support beaver, river otter, mink, muskrat, raccoon, red fox, coyote, and striped skunks.

No Action: This Alternative offers no guarantee as to the continued maintenance of natural habitats and the species which depend on them. Anticipated changes in land uses such as sand and gravel operations, logging, or grazing could reduce the existing high quality wildlife habitat values.

6. Unique, endangered, fragile, or limited environmental resources:

Proposed Action: Extensive riparian areas in nearly pristine condition are relatively rare in Montana. The braided section near Kalispell has many of these qualities; the proposed project would help ensure at least a part of this dynamic ecosystem would be maintained into the future. The project would also benefit breeding, wintering, and migrating bald eagles, a federally threatened species. It benefits river otter, osprey, and great blue herons, also species of special interest in Montana (Flath 1991). In addition, the project would benefit bull trout, a species warranting listing as a federal threatened or endangered species, and west-slope cutthroat trout, a fish species of special concern in Montana (Flath 1991).

No Action: The opportunity to protect a biologically important, relatively rare and unique riparian/wetland community would be foregone.

B. EVALUATION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

1. Noise/Electrical Effects/Transportation

Proposed Action: Noise from recreation activities including hunting would probably be similar to that which exists today. No other noise effects expected. No impacts on electricity supply or demand or transportation are expected.

No Action: Noise from recreational uses could be the same as the Proposed Action. There is a low probability that activities such as sand and gravel extraction or logging might occur at some point in the future. If these activities did occur, they would contribute to noise impacts in a natural setting and relatively quiet area. No impact to electrical or transportation effects are expected.

2. Public or Government Services/Schools/Utilities

Proposed Action: The Proposed Action should result in no impact on public services or utilities. The proposed action will have no impact on local schools and should not require any other government services (outside of FWP) except during the development of a weed management plan. The proposed project will result in increased management responsibility for FWP; this could be translated into service contracts or employment. The costs may be shared between the Riparian/Wetland Conservation Program and FWP Wildlife Management Area programs.

No Action: Minimal impacts expected to government services, schools, or public utilities due to low probability of permanent development occurring within the main channel of the Flathead River.

3. **Existing and Future Land Uses/ Industrial & Agricultural Production/ Housing**

Proposed Action: Existing land use is primarily recreational. Therefore, no impacts to existing land uses are expected. Commercial timber harvest was contemplated by the existing landowner. Given the current transportation expenses associated with commercial timber harvest on an island (e.g. helicopter or highlines), harvest limits within Streamside Management Zones, and water quality regulations, the present gross commercial timber value (approximately \$10,000 - \$12,000) is not great enough to cover these costs. However, future values are unknown. Because of the high value older cottonwood and spruce trees have to wildlife, the proposed management plan does not include commercial timber harvest as an objective.

Because of the island's current location in the middle of the Flathead mainstem, the site is not generally suited for agricultural, industrial, residential, or most commercial activities. Industrial activities such as sand and gravel operations would probably never occur due to environmental concerns. However, private recreation-based commercial activities such as landowner outfitting on the island could occur. The Proposed Action would preclude exclusive private commercial operations.

Land use and associated impacts associated with fee-title acquisitions under the Riparian/Wetland Conservation Program were disclosed in the Riparian/Wetland Programmatic EIS issued September 1995 by FWP.

No Action: Although there is a low probability of residential, industrial, or commercial development occurring on an island in the main channel of the Flathead River, these land uses would not be precluded under the no action alternative. Likely potential land uses under the No Action Alternative include use of 20-40 older spruce trees for house logs or other wood products, cottonwoods for pulp, and the island for private recreational purposes which might include cabin sites, houseboat sites, and/or commercial hunting preserve.

4. **Risk/Health Hazards**

Proposed Action: Recreational use of the Flathead River near Kalispell is increasing due to population increases and diversity of water craft available today. Recreational use on the Flathead mainstem may also increase with increasing availability of public lands within the river system. The risks to human health and safety associated with floating on the Flathead River (the degree of which depends on weather, season, water flows, woody debris, type of boat, and many other factors) may also increase somewhat with the purchase of Morris Island. Any increase in recreational activities due to the proposed project and other potential ownership changes (for example, the completion of Coriell project by FWP or its claim as school trust land by DNR) could lead to increased public use of the river and consequentially, an increase in the rate of boating/recreating accidents.

No Action: Increasing population growth in the Flathead with its resulting increase in recreational use of the river is likely to occur without the proposed action. The extent of this increase may not be as great under this Alternative because slightly less public land in the river would be available.

5. **Recreation/Local Economy/Aesthetics/Open Space**

Proposed Action: The proposed action will help maintain high quality fish and wildlife habitat associated with the island. It will also help maintain the existing recreational opportunities associated with the Flathead River islands which, in turn, will maintain or encourage local river-related economies such as fishing, boating, bird-watching, and hunting. The proposed action will maintain existing open-space and aesthetics of the area. However, this alternative would not allow commercial development of these recreational opportunities (e.g. commercial hunting preserve). These general impacts have been described in the Riparian/Wetland Programmatic EIS issued September 1995 by FWP (FWP 1995).

The fact that the FNF is exchanging the remaining 18 acres of the Morris island to FWP enhances the recreational values and management opportunities and consistency on the island.

No Action: Both the habitat base and public recreational opportunity which exist on the island would not be assured. If sold privately, the Morris property would probably be purchased for personal recreational purposes or for profit from its recreational values (e.g. by a landowner/outfitter). Recreation, as the most marketable aspect of the property, would likely continue under both alternatives. However, the proposed action would allow public recreation while the No Action could result in private recreation.

6. **Taxes, Financial, Employment Opportunities, Private Business**

Proposed Action: A Socio-Economic Assessment for the proposed action is attached (Appendix D). As discussed in this report, the Proposed Action will maintain the current tax proceeds to Flathead County as FWP wildlife/habitat programs are required to make Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) to the county where they purchase land. Future tax proceeds which might occur from commercial activities (e.g. timber, outfitting) would not be available under the Proposed Action.

The Proposed Action will help maintain current habitat and public recreation opportunities and help to maintain existing demand for outdoor recreation equipment and services.

No Action: The impacts would be similar to the Proposed Action with the addition that under the No Action Alternative, some type of commercial activity may occur at some point in the future.

7. **Cultural/Historic Resources**

Proposed Action: No expected impact. No permanent structures or vegetation or soil disturbance would occur under this Alternative. The EA is currently being reviewed by the State Historic Preservation Office and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes culture committees to determine if any cultural or historic values exist within the proposed project area.

No Action: No immediate impact. Future impacts unknown at this time.

8. Cumulative Effects

Proposed Action: The Proposed Action could stimulate additional interest from private landowners to donate, sell or otherwise transfer to FWP a conservation easement, lease, or fee-title to their privately owned islands within the Flathead River as a means to mitigate for the habitat losses at Hungry Horse dam. However, FWP would not be able to pursue any of these potential projects until DNRC releases their potential interest in claiming these islands. If private landowners do pursue working with FWP, this may stimulate DNRC's need to "adjudicate" their lands within the Flathead mainstem. The results of adjudication may result in conversion of previously existing "private lands" to DNRC ownership.

On the other hand, due to the complexity in determining island ownership with DNRC, private landowners may not pursue additional riparian/wetland projects with FWP in the Flathead mainstem. In this case, the cumulative effects of additional habitat conservation may or may not be realized, depending on the role DNRC takes in adjudication.

Ultimate protection of the braided island sections within the Flathead from future development whether as part of DNRC or FWP ownership, would benefit the existing habitat values, local economy, aesthetics and open space needs of the Flathead Valley. It would help encourage the existing rural lifestyle associated with the east side of the Flathead River and Lower Valley areas. The proposed project fits in well with existing public ownership patterns. It would minimize future costs to government associated with flooding impacts to developments in highly vulnerable flood plains.

Other socio-economic impacts of the Proposed Action are set forth in the Socio-Economic Assessment report attached to this EA (Appendix D). The cumulative impacts of the Riparian/Wetland Conservation Program were also disclosed in a Final Programmatic EIS issued in September, 1995 by FWP.

No Action: If FWP does not purchase the Morris property, the cumulative biological and socio-economic benefits may or may not be realized and the negative environmental impacts may occur as described under the No Action Alternative.

PART IV. CONCLUSION SECTION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?

The environmental impacts of this particular project are primarily positive; the project will result in benefits to physical and biological environment and will maintain existing land uses, tax base, and recreational opportunities. The loss of future economic values associated with resource extraction are not considered significant when weighed against the impacts of these activities on this sensitive environment. The project is consistent with the goals, objectives, and strategies (number 2) of the Riparian/Wetland Conservation Program, an obligation FWP has to mitigate the effects of Hungry Horse Dam on wildlife habitat. The environmental effects of this program have been disclosed in both a Draft and Final EIS's.

2. Describe the level of public involvement for this project, if any, and given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the Proposed Action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?

A notice of this Draft EA will be sent to approximately 50-75 individuals, organizations, or public offices. A news release and legal notice of EA availability and the a formal public comment period will be sent to all regional daily and weekly newspapers. A public hearing is scheduled for 7 p.m. at the Outlaw Inn, 2701 Highway 93 South, Kalispell, MT on Wednesday, April 30, 1997.

In addition, during development of both the Draft and Final Programmatic EIS's for the Riparian/Wetland Conservation Program, numerous public hearings and comment periods were held throughout northwest Montana (FWP 1995).

3. Duration of comment period for the Environmental Assessment:
April 9, 1997 - May 9, 1997

4. Other jurisdictional agencies/organizations:

The Flathead Regional Development Office and the Kalispell Planning Board have the primary review authority over development projects within 4 miles of Kalispell's city limits. The Flathead County Commission is responsible for final approval of proposed developments within the County. These entities and other county or state agencies, public interest organizations, Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes, and interested citizens will receive a notification or copy of the Draft and Final EA's as well as draft and final management plans. All adjoining private and public land owners will be sent the notification of the public hearing and copies of the Draft EA.

5. Individuals/groups contributing to the EA?

Gael Bissell, Wildlife Biologist, FWP
Rob Brooks, Economist, FWP
Dan Casey, Wildlife Biologist, FWP
Mark Deleray, Fisheries Biologist, FWP
Darlene Edge, Land Agent, FWP
Brent Mitchell, Flathead Audubon Society
Alan Wood, Wildlife Mitigation Coordinator, FWP

6. Name, title, address and phone number of the persons(s) responsible for preparing the E.A.

Gael Bissell, Wildlife Biologist, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 490 North Meridian Rd.
Kalispell, MT 59901; (406) 751-4580.

Alan Wood, Wildlife Mitigation Coordinator, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Flathead National
Forest, 1935 3rd. Ave. East, Kalispell, MT 59901; (406) 758-5219.

REFERENCES CITED

Flath D. 1991. Species of Special Interest or Concern. Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks. January 1991.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks 1995a. Statewide Habitat Plan, Implementation of Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission, Habitat Montana Policy, October 1995.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks 1995b. Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement on the Riparian/Wetland Habitat Conservation Program, Sept. 11, 1995. Montana Dep. Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Kalispell, MT. 59901.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks 1996. Final Decision Notice and Final Environmental Analysis (EA) for the Coriell Island Purchase (14 pps plus appendices).

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REF:GB034-97.wpd

APPENDIX A

added letter u.
B1

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND CONSERVATION

TRUST LAND MANAGEMENT DIVISION

MARC RACICOT, GOVERNOR

1625 ELEVENTH AVENUE

STATE OF MONTANA

DIRECTOR'S OFFICE (406) 444-2074
TELEFAX NUMBER (406) 444-2684

PO BOX 201601
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March 3, 1997

Arnold B. Morris and Carol C. Morris
130 Shawnee Drive
Bigfork, MT 59911

Mr. Joel Holtrop, Forest Supervisor
Flathead National Forest
1935 Third Avenue East
Kalispell, MT 59901

Mr. Patrick Graham, Director
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Re: Morris Island in Sections 22 and 27, T28N, R21W, M.P.M., Kalispell 7.5-minute quadrangle, Flathead County, MT

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Morris, Mr. Holtrop, and Mr. Graham:

Attached is a copy of the report by our staff hydrogeologist, Teresa Kinley, regarding Morris Island in Sections 22 and 27, T28N, R21W, MPM. This review indicates that the State does not claim ownership to this island.

The Department continues to review the other landforms of concern submitted by Mr. and Mrs. Morris, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, and Flathead National Forest. We appreciate your patience and your assistance in providing information and resources pertinent to this review process. If you have any questions, please contact me at (406) 444-2074.

Sincerely,

Jeff Hagener, Administrator

Enclosure

c: Dan Smiley, Flathead National Forest
Darlene Edge, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks
Kevin Chappell, Agriculture and Grazing Management Bureau, TLMD, DNRC

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AGE REVIEW AND OWNERSHIP STATUS OF MORRIS ISLAND, FLATHEAD RIVER, MT

Sections 22 and 27, T28N, R21W, M.P.M.
Flathead County, Montana

by
Teresa Kinley, Hydrogeologist
Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Trust Land Management Division
February 27, 1997

AGE REVIEW AND OWNERSHIP STATUS OF MORRIS ISLAND, FLATHEAD RIVER, MT

Sections 22 and 27, T28N, R21W, M.P.M.
Flathead County, Montana

by
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Trust Land Management Division
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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Arnold B. Morris submitted a letter dated February 1, 1996 to Bill Wright, DNRC-NWLO requesting that the state provide him with a letter "stating if they are claiming ownership or any interest in either of the properties" in several sections in T28N, R21W in northwestern Montana (Figure 1) for which he provided copies of deeds. Part of these sections are crossed by the main stem of the Flathead River. He was particularly interested in the "island property" acquired from "Naimy's" in 1975 because he wanted to sell it. Morris Island comprises much of this "Naimy's" property. Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks is interested in purchasing the portion of Morris Island owned by Mr. Arnold Morris and possibly exchanging for the portion claimed by Flathead National Forest. Study of this area has been undertaken due to this request and interest by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, and Flathead National Forest.

GENERAL BACKGROUND OF STATE OWNERSHIP

Based on an 1844 U.S. Supreme Court decision (Pollard vs. Hagen 44 U.S. 212) the original 13 states held ownership of navigable riverbeds consistent with English law. The Supreme Court held that all new states would enter the Union under equal footing. Therefore, all of the states would own the lands beneath navigable rivers and lakes.

70-1-202, MCA confirms state ownership by declaring the state to be the owner of "all land below the water of a navigable lake or stream." 70-16-201, MCA clarifies that the state's ownership is only to the "...edge of the lake or stream at low-water mark." 70-18-203, MCA further provides that islands and accumulations of land formed in the beds of navigable streams belong to the state if there is no title or prescription to the contrary; i.e. an island existing prior to statehood that was surveyed and claimed by the United States government would not be state-owned.

77-1-102, MCA provides that abandoned beds of navigable streams or lakes lying within the meandered lines of the United States survey and all islands existing in the navigable stream or lake which have not been surveyed by the United States government, including lands which at any time in the past comprised such an island or part thereof, except lands owned by adjacent landowners as accretions, belong to the State of Montana to be held in trust for the benefit of the public schools of the state.

An island may form up out of the bed of the river, and then later attach to shore. The state retains ownership of these islands, even though they are no longer surrounded by water. A key criteria is that the sandbar stabilize as an island before attaching to shore. Sandbars that attach to shore before stabilization would be owned by the adjacent land owner as an accretion to their land. A recent Montana court decision looked to the establishment of vegetation in determining that a sandbar had grown and stabilized and therefore become an island.

Figure 1: Location of the study area.

The State of Montana recognizes the Flathead River, main stem, as a navigable waterway due to historical evidence of its commercial use. "Commercial navigation on the upper section of the main river consisted of steamboat traffic and log drives" (Heritage Research Center, 1986, p. 32). The state claims ownership of the bed of the Flathead River outside the Flathead Indian Reservation from low water to low water based on the Equal Footing Doctrine (1844) and state statute. Islands forming out of the bed of navigable waterways after Montana statehood (1889) would be claimed by the state. In addition, abandoned channels or portions of abandoned channels within the GLO meanders that result from avulsion are also claimed by the state.

COMMON TERMINOLOGY

Accretion, avulsion, and reliction are three terms used in describing river changes over time. Bates and Jackson, 1980, describe these terms in the "Glossary of Geology" as quoted in the following definitions. Accretion is "the gradual or imperceptible increase or extension of land by natural forces acting over a long period of time, such as on a beach by the washing-up of sand or the accumulation of sediment deposited by a stream." Rivers gradually change their position over time through lateral accretion. Islands are formed up out of the bed of a stream by vertical accretion. Avulsion is "a sudden cutting off or separation of land by a flood or by an abrupt change in the course of a stream," such as "by a sudden change in current whereby a stream deserts its old channel for a new one." Case law is well settled that the part of land cut off by avulsion still belongs to the original owner. Reliction is "the slow and gradual withdrawal of the water in the sea, a lake, or a stream, leaving the former bottom as permanently exposed and uncovered dry land; it does not include seasonal fluctuations in water levels."

LOCATION AND GEOMORPHIC COMPOSITION

Morris Island, is located between the middle and eastern branches of the Flathead River's main stem in Flathead County, southeast of Kalispell, MT (Figure 1 and Plate 1). Plate 1 shows Morris Island outlined and dotted in green in Sections 22 and 27, T28N, R21W, M.P.M. Two core areas are connected by a channel zone, (see dashed lines in the northern portion of the island). Another channel area with some ponded water is present in the southern portion of the island. Less mature vegetation in the northern channel area is visible in aerial photographs. Part of the northern channel area appears to be a high water channel and the southern channel area may be as well. The process of sediment accumulation in the channels could result from reliction, accretion, and/or avulsion. The channels could be high water features that have not been eroded sufficiently to maintain continuous flow of the river through them. When the water recedes it exposes the bed of the channel which is higher than normal flow levels. The river may also leave behind new deposits in the channels. The channels could also be abandoned by avulsive events, or these areas could have gradually plugged with sediment, resulting in the river moving around the cores in an alternative direction. Lateral accretion of sediment to the island has been occurring on the northeastern side, the southwestern side, and the southern tip, on the inside curves of the river. The river has also eroded portions of the island as evidenced by cutbanks exposed along shore and changes seen in the aerial photographic record.

AGE OF TREES

Counting of annual growth rings was utilized to determine the age of 13 trees on Morris Island. Nine trees checked for age are cottonwood trees and four are spruce trees. Table 1 lists the age of trees corresponding to the numbers and approximate tree locations shown on Plate 1 and provides additional information on these trees. The oldest of the three trees checked on the north core is a cottonwood, CT-5, with 130 annual growth rings counted and an estimated age of 147 years (1849). The oldest cottonwood tree cored on the

MORRIS ISLAND

T28N, R21W, M.P.M.
Section 22 & 27

- Morris Island
 - Approximate tree location
 - CT Cottonwood tree
 - ST Spruce tree
 - |— Approximate Flathead National Forest land boundary
- River and island boundaries from aerial photograph NAPP-8405-68R, 7/18/95.
Section lines and National Forest boundary from revised KallsPELL topo. '82.

PLATE 1

TABLE 1

FLATHEAD RIVER ISLAND AGE STUDY
SUMMARY OF TREE DATA 12/18/96

ISLAND	CODE	SPECIES	DESCR	DBH-DB	BARK	RADIUS	CORE LENGTH	RINGS COUNTED	ESTIMATED AGE	ORIGIN	NOTES
MORRIS	MOR-ST-1	Spruce	green	41.5	1	19.8	19.2	132	137	1859	Core at DBH. Age estimate +- 2 years
	MOR-ST-2	Spruce	green	39.4	1.0	18.7	16.7	122	127	1869	Core at DBH. Age estimate +- 2 years.
	MOR-ST-3	Spruce	green	23.3	1.1	21.1	10.5	123	126	1870	Core just misses center. Estimate based on rings needed to hit center. Dark thickness was estimated based on core length.
	MOR-ST-4	Spruce	green	34.8	1.0	16.4	14.3	197	202	1794	Core at DBH. Age estimate +- 5 years due to broken section of core.
	MOR-CT-1	Cottonwood	green						100	1896	no core available, field estimate.
	MOR-CT-2	Cottonwood	green	43.9	2	20.0			80+	1916	no core available, field estimate, rotten at center.
	MOR-CT-3	Cottonwood	green	37.4	3.0	15.7	15.2	180	182	1814	Core at DBH. Age estimate +-5 years due to center rot in tree
	MOR-CT-4	Cottonwood	green	57.2	2	26.6	11.3	117	270	1726	Age estimate based on average growth rate [(10.3 rings/inch) x 15.3"] + 117 years. Bark thickness was estimated, not measured.
	MOR-CT-5	Cottonwood	green	40.5	2.0	18.3	16.6	130	147	1849	Core at DBH. Age estimated using 9 rings/inch = rate near center of tree. [9 r/i x (18.3-16.6 inches)] + 130 years.
	MOR-CT-6	Cottonwood	green	44.9	2.0	20.5	17.2	109	122	1874	Core at DBH. Age estimated using 3 rings/inch = rate near center of tree. [3 r/i x (20.5-17.2 inches)] + 109 years. Age uncertain due to soft material near center of tree

TABLE 1 (continued)

FLATHEAD RIVER ISLAND AGE STUDY
SUMMARY OF TREE DATA 12/18/96

ISLAND	CODE	SPECIES	DESCR	DBH-OB	BARK	RADIUS	CORE LENGTH	RINGS COUNTED	ESTIMATED AGE	ORIGIN	NOTES
MORRIS											
	MOR-CT-7	Cottonwood	green	42.0	2.5	18.5	18.1	113	117	1879	making core reading difficult. This is a conservative estimate, the tree is probably older. Core at DBH. Age estimated using 4 rings/inch = rate near center of tree. $[4 \text{ r/i} \times (18.5-18.1 \text{ inches})] \div 113 \text{ years}$.
	MOR-CT-8	Cottonwood	green	37.7	2.0	16.9	13.2	95	112	1884	Core at DBH. Age estimated using 4 rings/inch = rate near center of tree. $[4 \text{ r/i} \times (16.9-13.2 \text{ inches})] \div 95 \text{ years}$. Tree very soft near center, impossible to obtain complete core.
	MOR-CT-9	Cottonwood	green	49.5	3.3	21.5	9.3	60	123	1873	Core at DBH. Age estimated using 5 rings/inch = rate near center of tree. $[5 \text{ r/i} \times (21.5-9.3 \text{ inches})] \div 60 \text{ years}$. Tree very soft near center, impossible to obtain a readable core.

From Coriell and Morris Island Investigations, December 17-18, 1996 report by Allen Wolf, Silviculture Supervisor, NWLO, DNRC.

south core is CT-4 (Figure 2), with 117 rings counted and an estimated age of 270 years (1726). Of the four spruce trees cored on the south core, ST-4 is the oldest with 197 rings counted and estimated age of 202 years (1794).

OWNERSHIP STATUS

The age of trees on Morris Island indicates that the two core portions of the island were present prior to statehood in 1889. Therefore, Montana DNRC, Trust Land Management Division does not claim ownership of this island.

The northern channel zone between the north and south core of Morris Island and the southern channel area on this island are not part of the river meanders shown on the Government Land Office survey (Rakowicz, 1891). Therefore, these channel areas would not be claimed by the state as abandoned channels. Additional work would be necessary to determine the actual process of channel formation and abandonment, but this is beyond the scope of this study. It is likely that the channels are high water channels due to presence of water in small channel depressions noted within the larger channel area.

WORK SUMMARY

My review of this island has included preliminary AutoCAD overlays, aerial photo interpretation, gathering flow information, and field work which included coring trees using increment borers, counting annual growth rings from the cores, two sediment profile descriptions and samples (one each core), and geomorphological and vegetation observations. Flathead National Forest (FNF) personnel have assisted me in collecting tree cores (Figures 3 and 4), counting growth rings, measuring tree diameters, digging for a sediment profile site, and collecting information on local changes in topography (1 ft or greater) in different directions across the northern core and part of the associated channel. Allen Wolf, DNRC-NWLO Silviculture Supervisor, supplemented work by Dan Smiley, FNF, and myself by collecting additional tree cores and counting and interpreting the information they provided. Marc Burkhardt, FNF, also collected some GPS data for tree locations (Figure 5) to check signal penetration through the vegetative canopy and to establish some tie points for additional work if needed. Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and Walt Bahr, Flathead Land Trust, provided transportation by boat to Morris Island. The details of the work noted above and interpretations drawn from it will be included in a forthcoming geomorphologic report on the area.

REFERENCES

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Rakowicz, Ernest, 1891, Survey of Fractional Township No. 28 North, Range No. 21 West of the Principal Meridian Montana, Surveyed 1/17-31/1891, Approved by the Surveyor General's Office, Helena, MT, June 22, 1891, available from Bureau of Land Management, Cadastral Survey, Billings, MT.

Wolf, Allen, 1996, Coriell and Morris Island Investigations: Unpublished MT DNRC internal report submitted to Teresa Kinley, Hydrogeologist, MT DNRC, Helena, by Silviculture Supervisor, (Allen Wolf), MT DNRC, NWLO, 12/17-18/96, 10 p.

APPENDIX B

MORRIS ISLAND DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN

April 9, 1997

I. PURPOSE

The goal of this management plan is to describe how the Morris portion (approximately 40 acres) of the entire 58 acre island will be managed by FWP upon approval for its purchase by the FWP Commission. It can be assumed that the same management plan would be extended to the 18 acres at the north end of the island should the ongoing land exchange between FNF and FWP be completed. That land exchange is part of a separate proposal which would be addressed through the FNF National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

The Morris Island Management Plan describes the history and wildlife values of this island, outlines management goals and objectives, specifies various actions FWP plans to implement over the next 2 years, and gives interim guidance on public recreation management until more accurate data can be collected.

If the Morris project is approved, FWP would include their interest in the Morris Island in the Wildlife Division's network of approximately 40 Wildlife Habitat Protection Areas (WHPA's) across the Montana. WHPA's are usually small parcels of land, often donated or sold to FWP below market value, which hold exemplary wildlife habitats or special wildlife use areas such as nesting islands. FWP manages several WHPA's in the Flathead basin including two islands within Flathead Lake.

The management philosophy behind the management of WHPA's is focused on protecting the wildlife habitat and special wildlife uses of the property. Recreation can occur on most WHPA's; however, only low impact types of uses are encouraged. Recreation is often discouraged during critical periods of wildlife use (e.g. during spring waterfowl nesting).

II. MANAGEMENT GOALS

The management goal for Morris Island would be: " to protect and maintain the riparian/wetland values and special wildlife uses associated with this island property and to allow recreation uses which do not undermine or impact these natural values".

There is a potential for including the Morris property into the Montana Natural Areas Program. This potential will be evaluated during implementation of this management plan.

The Management Plan is organized by the following objectives: 1. Maintain Habitat Values; 2. Provide Public Recreational Opportunities; 3. Monitoring/Adaptive Management.

III. GENERAL PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

The Morris property occupies approximately 40 acres of a 58 acre island within the main channels of the Flathead River (Figs.1 & 2). The property is comprised of both riparian and wetland habitats in nearly pristine condition. The dominant overstory consists of very mature cottonwood

and spruce (older trees ranging from 100 to nearly 200 years old), a dense understory of deciduous shrubs, younger spruce trees, and many types of herbaceous communities (cattail, sedge, grasses). The island contains a few abandoned river channels. The island lies between the highly active or "delta" section of the Flathead River and its confluence with the Stillwater River. At this confluence, the Flathead River becomes a wide, single channel, meandering river system. The highly braided channel area north of the Morris Island is caused by the change in gradient between the upper and lower Flathead River systems.

The lower portion of the Flathead River from Flathead Lake up to this braided river section is influenced by Kerr dam. The operation of Kerr Dam maintains higher than normal water levels in the Flathead River mainstem during the summer months. One can see both the erosional aspects of the higher water levels (as well as of normal river channel activity) as well as the depositional aspects from the upper river on the Island.

The dynamic and unpredictable nature of this river section has helped maintain this island's relatively undisturbed nature. As a result, Morris Island supports some of the best and last examples of undisturbed mature and old growth riparian forest and high quality riparian habitats within the entire upper Flathead mainstem corridor.

The Morris Island is adjacent to various types of public and private lands. The Flathead National Forest (FNF) owns approximately 18 acres on the north end of Morris Island. FNF is in the process of exchanging their Flathead River tracts to FWP. To the northeast of Morris, along Brenneman's Slough, another 12 acres of riparian forest was donated to FWP. Flathead County Parks and Recreation owns an undeveloped parcel on Leisure Island northwest of Morris (Fig. 2). The Department of State Lands owns approximately 442 acres of state land upstream of the proposed project. This area was designated in the late 1970's as Montana's first State Natural Area. The 442 acre parcel has been leased by Flathead County in the past; however, this lease was recently transferred to the Flathead Audubon Society.

In 1995, FWP agreed to purchase approximately 73 acres of the nearby Coriell Island from the Flathead Land Trust. The final approval for this project is awaiting determination by DNRC to their claim to all or a portion of this island.

IV. MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

A. Maintain/Enhance Habitat Values and Ecosystem Functions

The major purpose of this land acquisition is to ensure the long-term protection and maintenance of the riparian/wetland values and the dynamic ecosystem functions associated with river islands. The Morris Island presently supports a wide variety of riparian and wetland habitats typical of river bottom forest including gravel and sand bars, backwater channels, cattail and sedge marshes, dense riparian shrub cover types, and young to very mature cottonwood/spruce forest. The following description represents the key aquatic, wetland, and riparian habitats and general fish and known wildlife values associated with these habitat types.

1. Aquatic Habitat Types

The island provides a diversity of shoreline habitats from high-gradient gravel-bottomed channels (upstream end) to shallow or deep mud-bottomed channels or sloughs. These

habitats support a wide array of aquatic plants and animals which in turn provide habitat for resident and migratory juvenile and adult fish such as bull trout, west-slope cutthroat trout, pygmy and lake whitefish, rainbow trout, lake trout (mackinaw), northern pike, large-scale sucker, squawfish and peamouth. Western toads and painted turtles also use these aquatic habitat types. Great blue herons, solitary sandpipers, and killdeer are commonly found foraging along the shoreline. Many species of diving ducks can be seen year-round on the main channels including common mergansers, hooded mergansers, common goldeneyes, and Barrows goldeneyes as well as dabbling ducks such as Canada geese, mallards, and green-winged teal.

Aquatic furbearing mammals are common along the shoreline, logjams, and backwater channels and include river otter, beaver, mink, and muskrat.

2. Riparian Habitat Types

The dense shrub cover along backwater sloughs and channels provides excellent upland nesting habitat for mallards, Canada geese, ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasants, and wild turkey. The older cottonwood snags provide cavity nesting habitat for wood ducks, common and hooded mergansers, woodpeckers, tree swallows, and chickadees. The old snags are used by nesting osprey, Canada geese, and owls. Overhanging banks provide nesting habitat for belted kingfisher, bank swallows, and rough-winged swallows. Riparian shrubs and mature cottonwood habitats also provide nesting habitat for a variety of neo-tropical migrants and other passerines. The security, cover, and high quality forage on the island provide important year-round habitat for white-tailed deer.

The island's accumulated log jams, dead and down material, berry-producing shrubs such as hawthorn provide habitat for raccoons, striped skunks, coyotes, and red fox. Black bear and moose are occasional visitors.

3. Proposed Actions

- a. FWP would complete an inventory and map of all aquatic, wetland, and riparian habitats and their associated species and values during the two field seasons following purchase of the Island. This baseline report would include photo points, vegetation lists, cover type maps, stand size and stocking, species lists, weed maps, human disturbances, and other data from which future changes in habitat can be detected or quantified. This baseline information would be important for monitoring both natural or man-made changes, developing new management policies as needed, and to ensure maintenance of the existing habitat qualities and functions.
- b. FWP would incorporate a weed management plan into the Morris Island Management Plan. This plan would address how FWP intends to meet county weed management obligations. The weed management plan would address the current infestation of Canada thistle and any other weeds observed during baseline inventories.
- c. FWP would plan to take at least one field inspection trip each year for purpose of monitoring habitat changes or human impacts, updating resource values, and recommending management changes if needed. FWP would encourage members

of local interest groups to participate and assist on this field trip(s). Field inspections would include an inventory any human-related problems such as garbage, permanent blinds, weeds, etc. and natural events or changes such as tree blowdowns, new beaver channels or tree cuts, tree diseases, erosion or depositional events, etc. A record of field investigations will be kept with the management plan.

- d. FWP will evaluate the benefits or detriments of including the Morris project within the Montana Natural Areas Program.

B. Maintaining Public Recreational Opportunities

Maintaining recreation opportunities for the general public is an important but secondary objective of the Morris island acquisition. Many islands in the mainstem Flathead are perceived as being in public ownership regardless of plat status. Purchase of Morris Island by FWP will insure some degree of public access, provided access does not conflict with the habitat objectives stated above.

1. Current Recreation Activities

Current recreation uses of Morris Island, although a private island, seem to be similar to that which occurs on most islands in the mainstem whether claimed as private or public: boating; picnicking; fishing; day hiking; photography; asparagus picking; bird watching; camping; waterfowl, upland bird, and deer hunting; and furbearer trapping. The Island has never been posted. Due to the density of vegetation and downed woody material, much of the island is rarely accessed.

Most of these recreational activities which take place occur seasonally, such as boating in the summer, hunting in the fall, or trapping in the winter. Based on preliminary observations, these activities seem to have had little or no impact on the islands's habitat quality.

a. **Spring:** Intense or frequent recreation activities during the spring bird nesting/reproduction period (March through June) could impact nesting success of waterfowl and other wildlife species. Dogs allowed to run through the island can pose a significant hazard. However, because of the difficulty in negotiating the ever-changing channels near Morris with normal propeller motor boats, the lack of an easy access point adjacent, and rising treacherous water associated with spring runoff, public use during this time does not appear to be in conflict with nesting/reproducing wildlife. This could change with the increased use of jet boats and jet skis which can negotiate the shallow channels and can go up or down stream with few problems.

b. **Summer:** During summer, Flathead Lake is at full pool which allows normal propeller boats to reach Morris from the lower Flathead and Stillwater Rivers. Also, floating from Old Steel down to Foy's bend or from Leisure Island is fairly common as the water levels stabilize and warm. Due to the construction of the selective withdrawal system at Hungry Horse dam, the Flathead mainstem water should be warmer than in the past. This may increase recreational activities on the mainstem. Fishing, picnicking, hiking, bird watching, and camping, if it

occurs frequently, could disrupt wildlife populations using the island or impact habitat.

c. Fall: The fall season includes upland bird, waterfowl, and big game hunting seasons. The amount of hunting activity which takes place on Morris is not presently known; however, a few existing blinds indicate it is used by the public, probably on most weekends during the hunting season. As with the other recreational activities, if it becomes too frequent, impacts to habitat or wildlife may occur.

d. Winter: Trapping primarily for beaver, muskrat, mink, or river otter have probably occurred on Morris during the winter months. Access to the island from Leisure island is dependent on water levels and ice cover. The braided section of the Flathead has had one of the highest beaver colony densities recorded in the state. Additionally, river otters are abundant throughout the Flathead mainstem probably due to habitat quality and high security; Montana allows trappers to take as many beaver as they want, but only one river otter.

2. Recommended Actions:

- a.** Limit certain recreational uses which will likely have an impact on wildlife during the spring nesting/reproductive period or leave excessive signs of human use:
 - i.** no dogs/pets without leashes allowed from March 1 to June 30;
 - ii.** put up signs which explain management objectives and ask the public to minimize human impacts (pack it in/pack it out; other restrictions listed below);
 - iii.** no overnight camping or campfires except as provided by 23-2-303 MCA (Montana Stream Access Law). No permanent structures (e.g. duck blinds, deer stands, fire rings, tent poles etc.); temporary structures brought by an individual and removed by the individual after each hunt would be acceptable.
- b.** Provide copy of the final management plan to sporting good shops, County Offices and Library, local Chambers of Commerce, state and federal agencies, and interested publics to make them aware of management goals, objectives, and stipulations.
- c.** Coordinate management plan and monitoring with FWP enforcement staff, local interest groups, Flathead County Parks and Recreation.

C. Monitoring and Adaptive Management:

Most WHPA's receive little monitoring by FWP due to their small size, isolation, and lack of perceived need to monitor these areas because of low use. However, due to the proximity of Morris to a large population center, the evidence of some past recreational uses, and special wildlife values associated with the island, monitoring on a regular basis is recommended. This could be accomplished with volunteers, water safety patrols, and other FWP resource personnel working on the river. The purpose of monitoring would be to determine if any recreational or human activities are impacting wildlife or habitat values.

- a. Monitor recreation activities over the next 2 years to determine to what degree these activities take place, by whom, and with what frequency.
- b. Compile brief report of results of monitoring activities and any concerns and distribute to local interests, organizations, County Offices, and other interests.
- c. Develop proposed management recommendations through public review process and modify management plan as needed.

APPENDIX C

WILDLIFE SPECIES EXPECTED TO OCCUR ON MORRIS ISLAND BASED ON DATA COLLECTED AT THE OWEN SOWERWINE NATURAL AREA AND ADJOINING AREAS (D. Casey and others, FWP, unpublished data).

Game Species

White-tailed deer	Wood duck
Ring-necked pheasant	Mallard
Ruffed grouse	Common goldeneye
Wild turkey	Bufflehead
Morning dove	Hooded merganser
Canada goose	Common merganser

Furbearers

Beaver	Raccoon
Muskrat	Red fox
River otter	Coyote
Mink	Stripped skunk

Nongame Birds

Double-crested cormorant	Black-billed magpie
Great-blue heron	American crow
Osprey	Black-capped chickadee
Bald eagle	Red-breasted nuthatch
Sharp-shinned hawk	White-breasted nuthatch
Cooper's hawk	House wren
Red-tailed hawk	Ruby-crowned kinglet
American kestrel	Veery
Killdeer	Swainson's thrush
Spotted sandpiper	American robin
Ring-billed gull	Gray catbird
Western screech owl	Cedar waxwing
Great horned owl	European starling
Barred owl	Warbling vireo
Vaux's swift	Red-eyed vireo
Black-chinned hummingbird	Yellow warbler
Belted kingfisher	American redstart
Downy woodpecker	Northern waterthrush
Hairy woodpecker	MacGillivray's warbler
Northern flicker	Common yellowthroat
Pileated woodpecker	Black-headed grosbeak
Western wood pewee	Lazuli bunting
Willow flycatcher	Chipping sparrow
Least flycatcher	Song sparrow
Dusky flycatcher	Brewer's blackbird
Eastern kingbird	Brown-headed cowbird
Tree swallow	Northern oriole

**WILDLIFE SPECIES EXPECTED TO OCCUR ON THE MORRIS ISLAND BASED ON DATA
COLLECTED AT THE OWEN SOWERWINE NATURAL AREA AND ADJOINING AREAS
(Continued)**

Nongame Birds

Violet-green swallow
Rough-winged swallow
Bank swallow
Cliff swallow
Barn swallow

House finch
Pine siskin
American goldfinch
House sparrow

Amphibians and Reptiles

Western toad
Painted turtle
Common garter snake
Western terrestrial garter snake
Rubber boa

APPENDIX D

MORRIS ISLAND

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

**Prepared by:
Rob Brooks
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
April, 1997**

I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526 passed by the 1987 Legislature (MCA 87-1-241, MCA 87-1-242) authorizes Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to acquire an interest in land for the purpose of protecting and improving wildlife habitat. Additionally, the Northwest Power Act authorized funds for acquiring wildlife habitat due to habitat losses from the development of Libby and Hungry Horse dams. These acquisitions can be through fee title, conservation easements, or leasing. In 1989, the Montana legislature passed House Bill 720 requiring that a socioeconomic assessment be completed when wildlife habitat is acquired. These assessments evaluate the significant social and economic impacts of the purchase on local governments, employment, schools, and impacts on local businesses.

This socioeconomic evaluation addresses the fee title purchase of land owned by the Morris family. The report addresses the physical and institutional setting as well as the social and economic impacts associated with the proposed purchase.

II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

A. Property Description

The property is an island in the Flathead River located just upstream from the confluence of the Stillwater River. The Morris property comprises 40 acres of the fifty-eight acre island. The remaining acres are owned by the Flathead National Forest. A comprehensive description and map of the property are in the draft environmental assessment (EA).

B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations

Due to the braided nature of the Flathead River in this area, the islands in this section contain mature and old growth forest as well as excellent riparian habitat.

This land supports numerous game species (white-tailed deer, river otters, pheasants, turkey, and waterfowl) as well as habitat for a long list of other wildlife. A detailed list is provided on page 3 of the environmental assessment (EA) and management plan for the property.

As the management plan points out, this island provides a diversity of aquatic habitat (forage and cover) for fisheries, most notably the bull trout.

C. Current Use

The property is currently owned by the Morris family. They have left the land in an undisturbed state; no development has occurred on the property. Recreation is the main use on the property according to the EA.

D. Management Alternatives

At this point in time, two alternatives are available to the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks regarding the Morris property:

- 1) Fee title purchase of the property by FWP.
- 2) No purchase

Other alternatives were considered in regards to protecting the property such as conservation easements and leasing. They are discussed in the environmental assessment (EA).

Fee Title Purchase by FWP

Alternative 1, fee title purchase will provide protection to the land and wildlife of the Morris property in the long term. The property will continue to be managed for the benefit of the wildlife and fisheries. In addition, public access will be maintained.

No Purchase Alternative

This alternative requires some assumptions since management of the property will vary depending on what the Morris family decides to do with the property if FWP does not purchase the property. The Morris' have been approached about selling the property for cabin sites, private recreation or houseboat docking sites. In addition the owners have considered logging the old growth spruce and cottonwood. Any of these options would have negative impacts on the wildlife values and public recreation opportunities this property provides.

The economic impacts of the no purchase alternative have not been quantified here since they are unknown.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Section II identified the management alternatives this report addresses. Section III quantifies the social and economic consequences of the fee title purchase alternative following two basic accounting stances: financial and local area impacts.

Financial impacts address the cost of the fee title purchase to FWP and discusses the impacts on tax revenues to local government agencies.

Expenditure data associated with the use of the property provides information for analyzing the impacts of the purchase on local businesses (i.e. income and employment).

A. Financial Impacts

The financial impacts on FWP are related to the fee title purchase price and maintenance/management costs. The Morris property will cost FWP \$55,000. Maintenance/management costs related to the purchase are associated with the habitat monitoring anticipated for the land as well as a weed control management plan.

The financial impacts to local governments are the potential changes in tax revenues resulting from fee title purchase. The Morris' paid \$633.00 in taxes on this land in 1995.

Montana Code Section 87-1-603 requires FWP to pay the county "a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment of the property were it taxable to a private citizen". This payment in lieu of taxes provision on land owned by FWP insures Flathead County tax revenues from this land equal to what the Morris' currently pay the county.

B. Economic Impacts

The purchase of this land by FWP will not change the use of this land from what has occurred in the past. This land has not been used for commercial purposes in the past and these activities are not planned under FWP ownership. This area has been used for recreational purposes (picnicking, camping, hunting, boating) and these will continue

IV. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The Morris property purchase will protect important wildlife habitat in the Flathead River and help mitigate habitat losses from Libby and Hungry Horse dams. Since this property is located close to other public lands in the river corridor, public recreation opportunities are enhanced and protected.

The fee title purchase will not reduce the property tax revenues from this land to local government entities in Flathead County. Tax revenues in 1995 on this property were \$633.00.

There are no significant economic impacts associated with the purchase.

The fee title purchase of the Morris property appears to be in the public interest.