



SCOPING NOTICE
PROPOSED PUBLIC RECREATION EASEMENTS ON STATE TRUST LANDS
June 23, 2017

The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), Stillwater Unit, is soliciting comments and concerns on a proposed use of State Lands in the Smith Lake area near the head of Whitefish Lake and Beaver Lakes area. See Exhibit A – Map for details.

The City of Whitefish is proposing to purchase a public recreation use easement (similar to the Beaver Lakes Public Recreation Use Easement) on 480 acres in the proximity of Smith Lake. Within the public recreation use easement area, 0.6 miles of existing trail currently under a Land Use License (LUL) would be permanently secured and 3.4 miles of new trail would be constructed. The proposal also includes: additional parking and minor improvements to the existing Smith Lake parking area; an approximately 25 foot pedestrian bridge across Smith Creek; 1 to 2 acre day use site adjacent to the east side of Smith Lake Dam with amenities that include 2 vehicle ADA parking, picnic tables, vault toilet, kiosk and a pavilion (similar to the Lion Mountain pavilion); and a trailhead located on the East Smith Lake Road with amenities to include parking for 10-12 vehicles, kiosk, mutt mitt dispenser and bear-proof trash cans.

The City of Whitefish is also proposing to purchase a 16-foot-wide trail easement on 8.2 miles of trails between the Whitefish Trail Swift Creek Trailhead and North Beaver Connection Trailhead in the Beaver Lakes area. This would include 2.9 miles of existing trail currently under a Land Use License (LUL) to be permanently secured and 5.3 miles of new trail to be constructed. In conjunction with the proposed trails, 3 bridges would need to be built for connectivity from the Swift Creek Trailhead to the North Beaver Connection. The proposal would require pedestrian bridges to be constructed over Swift Creek, Lazy Creek and the BNSF Railroad tracks.

The trail leaving from Swift Creek Trailhead would be ADA accessible to the Swift Creek Bridge. Segments of the proposed trail are located in marshy areas and areas with braided channels. Trails proposed in these areas would require boardwalk construction, raised trail treads and gravel armoring.

The areas subject to the transactions are primarily located between the Smith Lake and Beaver Lakes area. The area lies north of Highway 93 West and East Lakeshore Road and is north and west of Whitefish Lake. Specifically, the area extends south of Del Rey Road, southwest and west of Del Rey Road, west of the Lower Whitefish Lake Road, and east of Lower Whitefish Lake Road. The area is in Township 32 North [T32N], Range 22 West [R22W], sections 29, 30, 31, 32, and 33 and Township 31 North [T31N], Range 22 West [R22W] sections 6, 7, and 8.

Funding for the purchase of the recreation easements would come from federal, state, and matching private donations and other sources, through Whitefish Legacy Partners, Inc. a Montana non-profit corporation.

This notice has been sent to you because you are a neighboring land owner or we believe you may have interest in the proposal area. In accordance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act, public concerns about the project and potential environmental impacts must be considered and analyzed prior to making the decision of whether to grant the easement.

You have until July 23, 2017 to submit your concerns or comments relating to these projects by mailing or e-mailing written comments to Nicole Stickney, *Stillwater State Forest, P.O. Box 164, Olney, MT 59927* or nstickney@mt.gov. If you have no comments, but would like to be kept on the mailing list for this project, call 406-881-2666 or e-mail that request during this same period. If no response is received, you will no longer remain on the mailing list.

