CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name:	Murray Lake Boat Ramp Removal
Proposed Implementation Date:	Fall 2025
Proponent:	MT DNRC Stillwater Unit
Location:	Northeast side of Murray Lake approximately 5 miles northwest of Whitefish in Section 18 Township 31 North Range 22 West
County:	Flathead

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

Existing Conditions: The project is situated on the northeast shoreline of Murray Lake, a body of water spanning 43 acres, with a maximum depth of 102 feet and a volume of 1,773 acre-feet. The project area contains unauthorized user-built recreational amenities including parking, boat ramp, and lake access trails. The user-built recreational amenities are constructed on steep grades with little or no erosion control or surface drainage. There is active erosion occurring on these amenities that deliver sediment directly to Murray Lake. This erosion leads to a widening of disturbed areas and increases in soil disturbance where users attempt to avoid loose soil or unsure footing. In its existing state, the user-built recreational amenities do not meet State Best Management Practices (BMPs).

The project will remove an unauthorized user-built boat ramp and block unauthorized motorized access to the lakeshore. Additionally, the project would include removal of approximately six unauthorized user-built parking spaces above the boat ramp.

The primary goal of this project is to stop current and future sediment delivery to Murray Lake. The existing user-built boat ramp is approximately 80 feet by 50 feet in size and is constricted by rock barriers on either side to prevent motorized use along the shoreline. The proposed project would mechanically remove rock barriers from the shoreline and scarify disturbed areas to encourage revegetation. Grass seed containing a native mix would be used to regenerate the site. A foot path would be mechanically constructed from the circle-drive to the shoreline to provide non-motorized access to the lake, including hand carried boats.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. List number of individuals contacted, number of responses received, and newspapers in which notices were placed and for how long. Briefly summarize issues received from the public.

- **DATE:**
  - August 26th, 2025 – September 10th, 2025. Original scoping ended September 8th, 2025, comments arrived through the morning of September 9th. In order to include these comments and provide additional opportunities for public comment, DNRC extended the scoping period through September 10th, at 4:30 pm.

- **PUBLIC SCOPED:**

- The scoping notice was posted on the DNRC Website: http://dnrc.mt.gov/public-interest/public-notices
- The scoping notice was posted at the site.
- Whitefish Legacy Partners

- **AGENCIES SCOPED:**
  - City of Whitefish, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Biologists and Wardens, Flathead County Commissioners, and Flathead County Planning Director.

- **COMMENTS RECEIVED:**
  - How Many: 4
  - Concerns:
    - Issue 1: Integration with broader planning efforts for a future Day-Use Site.
    - Issue 2: Walking Path concerns. Requesting DNRC move the trail to the west.
    - Issue 3: Parking concerns. Requesting DNRC add parking.
    - Issue 4: Human waste at the site.
  - Results:
    - Issue 1: Outside scope. As per the 2023 MOU between City of Whitefish and MT FWP, a feasibility study is underway to determine sustainable solutions to manage recreation at Murray Lake, with a focus on user access along the north and west shores. The outcome of the feasibility study is anticipated to minimize and mitigate resource damage while formalizing and managing recreation, including lake access and parking. The goal of the project is to mitigate resource damage with the knowledge of the expected submittal of a formalized and developed recreation proposal from the City of Whitefish, MT FWP,
    - Issue 2: Outside scope. The primary goal of this project is to stop current and future sediment delivery to Murray Lake. Future projects at Murray Lake are expected to help formalize and manage recreation.
    - Issue 3: Outside scope. The primary goal of this project is to stop current and future sediment delivery to Murray Lake from unauthorized, user-built amenities. Future projects at Murray Lake are expected to help formalize and manage recreation.
    - Issue 4: Outside scope. The primary goal of this project is to stop current and future sediment delivery to Murray Lake. Future projects at Murray Lake are expected to help formalize and manage recreation.
- **DNRC SPECIALISTS** were consulted, including:
  - Justin Cooper, Wildlife Biologist, DNRC NWLO
  - Josh Harris, Hydrologist, DNRC NWLO
  - Patrick Rennie, Archeologist, DNRC Helena

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2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:
Examples: cost-share agreement with U.S. Forest Service, 124 Permit, 3A Authorization, Air Quality Major Open Burning Permit.

Montana Department of Environmental Quality – 318 Authorization – To provide a short term water quality turbidity standard for construction activities to minimize sedimentation and protect water quality.

Flathead County Lake and Lakeshore Construction Permit – Flathead County. Montana Lakeshore Protection Act. Applies to all private individuals and government entities proposing to do work in or near a body of water within a county's jurisdictional area.

3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

Describe alternatives considered and, if applicable, provide brief description of how the alternatives were developed. List alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further analysis and why.

Action Alternative:
The Action Alternative includes the reclamation of an unauthorized user-built parking and boat ramp currently accessing Murray Lake. The user-built parking and boat ramp are steep, which has led to erosion issues and sediment delivery to the lake.

The proposed project will rehabilitate existing resource damage by mechanically removing rock barriers from the shoreline and scarify disturbed areas to encourage revegetation. Grass seed containing a native mix would be used to regenerate the site. A foot path would be mechanically constructed from the circle-drive to the shoreline to provide non-motorized access to the lake, including hand carried boats.

No Action Alternative:
Under this alternative, no reconstruction of the existing user-built amenities at Murray Lake would be completed. The unauthorized user-built boat ramp and parking would remain in its current condition which produces sediment delivery into Murray Lake.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to soils.

The site's geology is composed of Helena Formation deposits, which are layered cyclically, beginning with a base of either white quartzite or intraclast beds. These are followed by alternating couplets of green siltite and argillite and are capped with dolomite beds. A distinctive feature of these formations is the frequent presence of calcite pods and ribbons, known as molar tooth structure. The soils are derived from glacial till and metasedimentary rocks, making them prone to displacement and erosion. However, with proper mitigation, any potential impacts from soil disturbance would likely be immeasurable. Since there are no unusual or unstable geological features, no special reclamation considerations are necessary. Cumulative impacts from displacement and erosion will decrease over time, transitioning from a moderate to a low impact as a result of modifying the access route away from the fall line. Vegetation will be reestablished in bare locations.

Soil Mitigations: Operations should be restricted to dry and low-water conditions. Restricting work to dry and low-water conditions directly addresses the current erosion at the site by preventing the two main factors that accelerate it: saturated soil and uncontrolled surface runoff. When the soil is dry, it is more stable and less likely to be displaced by the weight of machinery or foot traffic. By working during low-water periods, any ground disturbance is less likely to be immediately washed away by a

nearby stream or heavy rain, which prevents sediment from being transported into the water and further downstream.

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to water resources.

The project is located on the northeast shoreline and is adjacent to Murray Lake, which spans 43 acres, has a maximum depth of 102 feet, and a volume of 1,773 acre-feet. The project will involve removing an existing boat ramp, which is a source of direct and active sediment delivery to the lake. The project area is not part of a municipal watershed as defined by ARM 36.11.447 (2)(c), and the potential for violating drinking water standards or degrading water quality is considered low. Although the removal of rock piers and light scarification of the shoreline will cause localized and temporary sedimentation, it is not expected to be a measurable impact. Water quality impacts due to sedimentation are expected to decrease over time and return to near-baseline conditions.

Water Quality Mitigations: To mitigate sedimentation, sediment control measures—including wood wattles, native seed, and water bars—will be implemented. Additionally, operations should be restricted to dry and low-water conditions.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e. particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to air quality.

No impacts on air quality are anticipated

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to vegetation.

Native grasses, sedges, forbes and brush may be disturbed during construction, but the impact will be minimal and is not considered significant. All disturbed areas will be reseeded with native vegetation upon project completion. The risk of direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts is considered low. A search of the Natural Resource Information System (NRIS) database found no known threatened, endangered, or sensitive plant species in the proposed area.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to fish and wildlife.

Terrestrial wildlife habitat in the parcel is primarily comprised of relatively closed canopy (≥40%) mature forest and the shoreline around Murray Lake. The proposed activities would not alter any forested habitat. The existing user-built boat ramp would be closed off from motorized access, and the bank would be stabilized with vegetation. The number of unauthorized, user-built parking spaces will be reduced, and a walking path will be established to provide non-motorized access to the lake and prevent further sedimentation issues.

Suitable loon nesting habitat occurs within the Project Area. Common loons have consistently nested on Murray Lake as recently as the 2025 breeding season. The loon nesting area is directly across the

lake, approximately 1,000 feet and within line of sight, from any proposed activity. Proposed activities associated with the Action Alternative would impact portions of shoreline habitat, but no suitable loon habitat would be altered. The proposed activities would occur during late summer or early fall, outside of loon nesting season and should be completed within one month. Murray Lake currently has a high level of recreational use year-round. Motorized access to the lake would be removed, limiting the number and size of watercrafts on the lake. Considering the timing of proposed activities, the short duration, and the lack of nesting habitat directly impacted by the proposed activities, negligible direct, indirect, or cumulative effects to common loons are be anticipated.

Fish species present in Murray Lake include redside shiner, westslope cutthroat trout, brook trout, and rainbow trout according to FWP's FishMT website. Currently, Montana FWP is regularly stocking Murray Lake with brook trout and rainbow trout. Direct, secondary, and cumulative impacts to habitat will be localized and are not expected to be measurable. Current impacts to fish populations and habitat will improve from pre-existing conditions.

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9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:
Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine impacts to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to these species and their habitat.

The proposed project is within the grizzly bear non-recovery occupied habitat associated with the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem (Wittinger 2002). Occasional use of the area by grizzly bears is possible due to its connectivity with recovery zone areas and lack of development. The proposed activities would not alter any grizzly habitat and would occur over a relatively short period of time; therefore, no adverse impacts to grizzly bears are anticipated.
The Project Area is over a mile from any known bald eagle nest site (MNHP 2025). However, there are multiple observations of eagles foraging and traveling in the vicinity of the proposed project (MNHP 2025). Eagles that use this area are likely habituated to substantial levels of human disturbance from surrounding residential, highway, and watercraft activity. Considering the limited duration and scope of the proposed project and the existing level of disturbance, no adverse impacts to balds eagles are anticipated.

Wildlife Mitigations:
If a threatened or endangered species is encountered, consult a DNRC biologist immediately. Similarly, if undocumented nesting raptors are encountered within ½ mile of the Project Area, contact a DNRC biologist.

References:
MNHP. 2025. Natural Heritage Map Viewer. Montana Natural Heritage Program. Retrieved on August 14 2025, from http://mtnhp.org/MapViewer.
Wittinger, W. 2002. Grizzly bear distribution outside of recovery zones. Unpublished memorandum. Report on file at USDA Forest Service, Region 1, Missoula, MT.

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10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:
Identify and determine direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

A Class I (literature review) level review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search results revealed that no cultural resources have been documented in the APE.

Proposed developments are expected to have *No Effect* to *Antiquities*. No additional archaeological investigative work will be conducted in response to this proposed development. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature, or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to aesthetics.

The project area is located in an aesthetically pleasing area, with high amounts of public use. The proposed project would not affect aesthetics.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:

Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to environmental resources.

No impacts on limited environmental resources are anticipated.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:

List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

- Beaver/Swift/Skyles Timber Sale Environmental Assessment (2009)
- Beaver to Skyles Public Recreation Use Easement Environmental Assessment (2013)
- Beaver to Boyle Timber Sale Environmental Assessment (2020)

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:

Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

No impacts on human health and safety are anticipated.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:

Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

No impacts on industrial, commercial and agriculture activities are anticipated.

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:

Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to the employment market.

No impacts on quantity and distribution of employment are anticipated.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:

Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to taxes and revenue.

No impacts on local and state tax base and tax revenues are anticipated.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:

Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of this and other projects on government services

No impact on the demand for public services is anticipated.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:

List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

Whitefish School Trust Lands Neighborhood Plan (WTLAC 2004) - Flathead County Growth Policy

The Project Area is part of the Beaver Lakes Subarea of the Whitefish Neighborhood Plan. Specific concepts and implementation strategies for this subarea apply, namely the goals of enhancing developed recreation with a multi-use trail system.

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:

Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the impacts of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to recreational and wilderness activities.

The unauthorized user-built recreational amenities do provide access to recreational activities but the quality of recreational access is currently low. The user-built parking and boat ramp are steep, hard to navigate on foot and has led to erosion issues and sediment delivery to the lake. The reclamation of unauthorized user-built amenities at Murray Lake will also include a foot path, mechanically constructed from the circle-drive to the shoreline to provide non-motorized access to the lake, including hand carried boats. The impact of the project is anticipated to increase the quality of access to recreational activities at the site.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:

Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to population and housing.

No impacts on density and distribution of population and housing are anticipated.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:

Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

No impacts on native or traditional lifestyles or communities are anticipated.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

No impacts on any culturally unique qualities and diversity are anticipated.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:
Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social impacts likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

No impacts on social and economic circumstances with regard to revenue generated for the trust are anticipated. The project is anticipated to protect the income generating capacity of the land by providing resource mitigation and protection.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name:**	Kari Nielsen	**Date:**	9/18/2025
	Title:	Area Planner, NWLO		

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

Upon Review of the Checklist EA, and attachments, I find the Action Alternative, as proposed, meets the intent of the project objectives as stated in the Type and Purpose of Action section of this document.

The Action Alternative complies with all pertinent environmental laws, the DNRC SFLMP and HCP, and is based upon a consensus of professional opinion on limits of acceptable environmental impact. For these reasons and on behalf of DNRC I have selected the Action Alternative to be implemented on this project.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

After a review of the scoping documents and comments, project file, Forest Management Rules, SFLMP and HCP checklists, and Department policies, standards, and guidelines, I find that all the identified resource management concerns have been fully addressed in this Checklist EA and its attachments. Specific project design features and various recommendations by the resource management specialists will be implemented to ensure that this project will fall within the limits of environmental change. Taken individually and cumulatively, the proposed activities are common practices, and no project activities are being conducted on important, unique or fragile sites.

I find there will be no significant impacts to the human environments as a result of implementing the Action Alternative. In summary, I find that the identified impacts will be controlled, mitigated, or avoided by the design of the project to the extent that the impacts are not significant.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ]	EIS	[ ]	More Detailed EA	[X]	No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name: Dave Ring** **Title: STW Unit Manager**
Signature: /s/ **David A. Ring**	**Date**: **September 26, 2025**