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Holter Lake-Gates of the Mountains Recreation Management Plan

PREPARED FOR:

Helena Lewis and Clark National Forest
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1 Introduction

The Missouri River is a nationally recognized river famous for its fishing, outstanding scenery, and the historical settings present throughout it. It is also a primary access route through the Gates of the Mountains, a distinctive limestone cliff formation along this portion of the Missouri River. This Comprehensive River Recreation Management Plan (CRRMP) covers an area proceeding north from Hauser Dam downstream through upper Holter Lake, continuing through the Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area to the downstream end of Holter Lake and ending at Holter Dam (**Figures 1-1 and 1-2**).

The river's outstanding natural resources and diverse recreational opportunities, combined with its proximity to Great Falls and Helena, contribute to its popularity. As local populations have expanded, recreational use has increased on the river, and concern over how this might impact river resources and recreation experience initiated this planning effort.

Recreation use of the Missouri River corridor is year-round but particularly high during the summer months when water recreation is the most active. A commercial tour boat operation offers boat trips up the river and there are a number of developed and dispersed recreation sites along the banks of the river. This area also provides access to the western portions of the Gates of the Mountain Wilderness, which covers 28,465 acres in the Big Belt Mountains.

1.1 Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area

The Missouri River Corridor has much historic and cultural significance. The term "Gates of the Mountains" was first used by Captain Meriwether Lewis in 1805 to describe these scenic and unique cliffs. Captain Lewis and Second Lieutenant William Clark passed through the corridor en route to the Pacific Ocean and on the return trip in 1805-06. It was Lewis who was responsible for naming the landmark and was the first to leave a record of his passage "from the singular appearance of this place I called it the gates of the mountains." The Gates of the Mountains, as it is known today, is one of the most widely recognized landmarks of the Lewis and Clark expedition.

The section of the Missouri River that flows through the Gates of the Mountains is approximately 5.75 miles long. Although water levels are about 100 feet higher now than they were in Lewis and Clark's time due to the impoundment behind Holter Dam, the cliffs and remote character of the river is retained.

1.2 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this CRRMP is to provide guidance to the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest (Forest Service) and to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Butte Field Office for managing recreation on Holter Lake, which is the section of the Missouri River impounded between Hauser Dam at the upper end and Holter Dam at the lower end, and the Gates of the

Mountains Recreation Area. The CRRMP will work within the established goals, objectives, and policies of the National Forest Plan and the Butte Resource Management Plan and intends to:

- provide management goals and objectives for the future,
- identify steps needed to achieve those objectives, and
- prioritize site improvements and management actions to achieve stated objectives.

The overall goal of the CRMMP being to provide safe and well managed recreation sites and dispersed use areas that provide enjoyable user experiences across a spectrum of opportunities and seasons.

A strategic plan that identifies desired future conditions, achievable goals, and timelines will guide successful management into the future.

The plan promotes a variety of high-quality recreation opportunities for a diverse public while protecting the natural resource values associated with the Missouri River and adjacent uplands. While not a resource management plan, this plan does recognize the important role the resources play in the recreational experience and the potential impacts recreation can have on those resources if not managed proactively.

The Forest Service is the lead agency in the development of this CRRMP, with collaboration and contributions by the BLM. Collaboration and coordination with other agencies and private landowners is important due to the diverse land ownership adjacent to the river and varying authority and management responsibilities.

1.3 History of Recreation Planning

This CRRMP focuses on Holter Lake. Other plans and management documents that have been reviewed and considered during the CCRMP process include:

- Draft Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 2018),
- Butte Resource Management Plan (BLM 2008),
- Missouri-Madison Comprehensive Recreation Plan (NorthWestern Energy 2016),
- Mann Gulch (24LC1160) Historic Preservation Plan (USDA Forest Service 2014), and
- Draft Upper Missouri River Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan 2019-2028 (Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks 2019).

1.4 Vision Statement

Holter Lake and the Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area provide **multiple-use public access** to **unique, scenic, and remote natural beauty**. The goal of the CRRMP is to **sustainably** manage these **diverse recreation opportunities** within the corridor, while preserving or enhancing the rich cultural and **ecological resources** for future enjoyment.

1.5 Planning Process Overview

The Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan identifies management goals and standards for all Forest Service lands. . The Draft Forest Plan identifies the Missouri River Corridor (MISCOR) as one component of the Big Belt Geographic Area and as such it describes Desired Conditions (DC), Goals (GO), Guidelines (GDL), and Suitability (SUIT) related to recreation management (USDA Forest Service 2018, Appendix B).

1.5.1 CRRMP Initiation

In December 2017, the Missouri-Madison River Fund awarded the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, in cooperation with the BLM Butte Field Office, a grant to partially fund development of this CRRMP. The CRRMP goals were to provide strategic planning to guide future management decisions and actions within the framework of existing public policy and resource plans. An overarching goal of the plan was to identify strategies and design specifications that will allow federal agencies to manage recreation sites sustainably into the future while providing a system of products that accurately reflect the need of river recreationists across jurisdictions.

As such, planning includes recommendations and conceptual site designs for reconstruction and upgrades at public recreation sites in the planning area. Sites evaluated for potential projects in the planning area include the Beaver Creek Access Site, Meriwether Picnic Area, Coulter Campground, Beartooth Landing Campground, Holter Lake Campground, Log Gulch Campground, Departure Point Recreation Area, and adjacent undeveloped federal lands (See Appendix A).

1.5.2 Stakeholder Selection and Collaboration

Stakeholders were identified in the summer of 2018. The intent was to include representatives from federal and state agency partners, utilities, community government and planning groups, outfitters, and individuals with business interests in the corridor. Twenty-three individuals were contacted and invited to participate in a stakeholder meeting held at the Helena-Lewis and Clark Supervisor's Office in Helena on September 26, 2018. Attendees included representatives from NorthWestern Energy, BLM, Lewis & Clark County Commission, Lewis and Clark County Development, Helena Tourism Alliance, Helena Ranger District, recreation planners, and outfitters.

Attendees worked to identify key elements for the vision statement and to develop a list of guiding principles included in this CRRMP. Discussions focused on the current diverse recreation experiences available and possible indicators of overuse of some sites. The group also discussed challenges for annual maintenance and interagency management of sites and resources including access points and methods, boater management, site capacity, seasonal pressures, and desires to maintain the values of the setting, its ecology, and historical uniqueness.

There was also discussion of the varying character of the waterway and users in the reservoir areas versus the more riverine segments. User expectations for facilities as well as the level of solitude differ from the Hauser outflow to the Holter Reservoir. These expectations were identified as important to setting desired conditions and identifying infrastructure projects in the corridor.

1.6 Land Ownership and Jurisdiction

The majority of lands bordering the Missouri River in the Holter region are publicly-owned. The primary agencies with land management in the corridor are the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest, the BLM, and the State of Montana (**Figures 1-1 and 1-2**). Montana state lands include state trust lands and the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area (WMA). In general, the Forest Service manages most of the eastern shore of the Missouri River from the Hauser Dam to just downstream of Mann Gulch, where the Beartooth WMA begins. The Beartooth WMA, which is managed by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) continues on the eastern shore to just upstream of Departure Point Recreation Area, which is managed by the BLM. Remaining public lands along the eastern shore of Holter Lake downstream to Holter Dam are managed by the BLM, but there are a few small private inholdings along this stretch.

On the western shore, the BLM manages lands from Hauser Dam to Foster Gulch. From Foster Gulch to a point on the northern outlet of Upper Holter Lake is privately owned. From this point to just opposite the Mann Gulch mouth (on the eastern shore) the land along the shoreline is part of the Beartooth WMA or Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest. The short river reach on either side of Beartooth Landing Campground is managed by BLM. Downstream of the Beartooth Landing, management remains with the BLM as part of the Sleeping Giant Wilderness Study Area. Lands then transition to State Trust Lands at a point on the lakeshore just below Jackson Peak. From here downstream to Holter Dam is privately-owned.

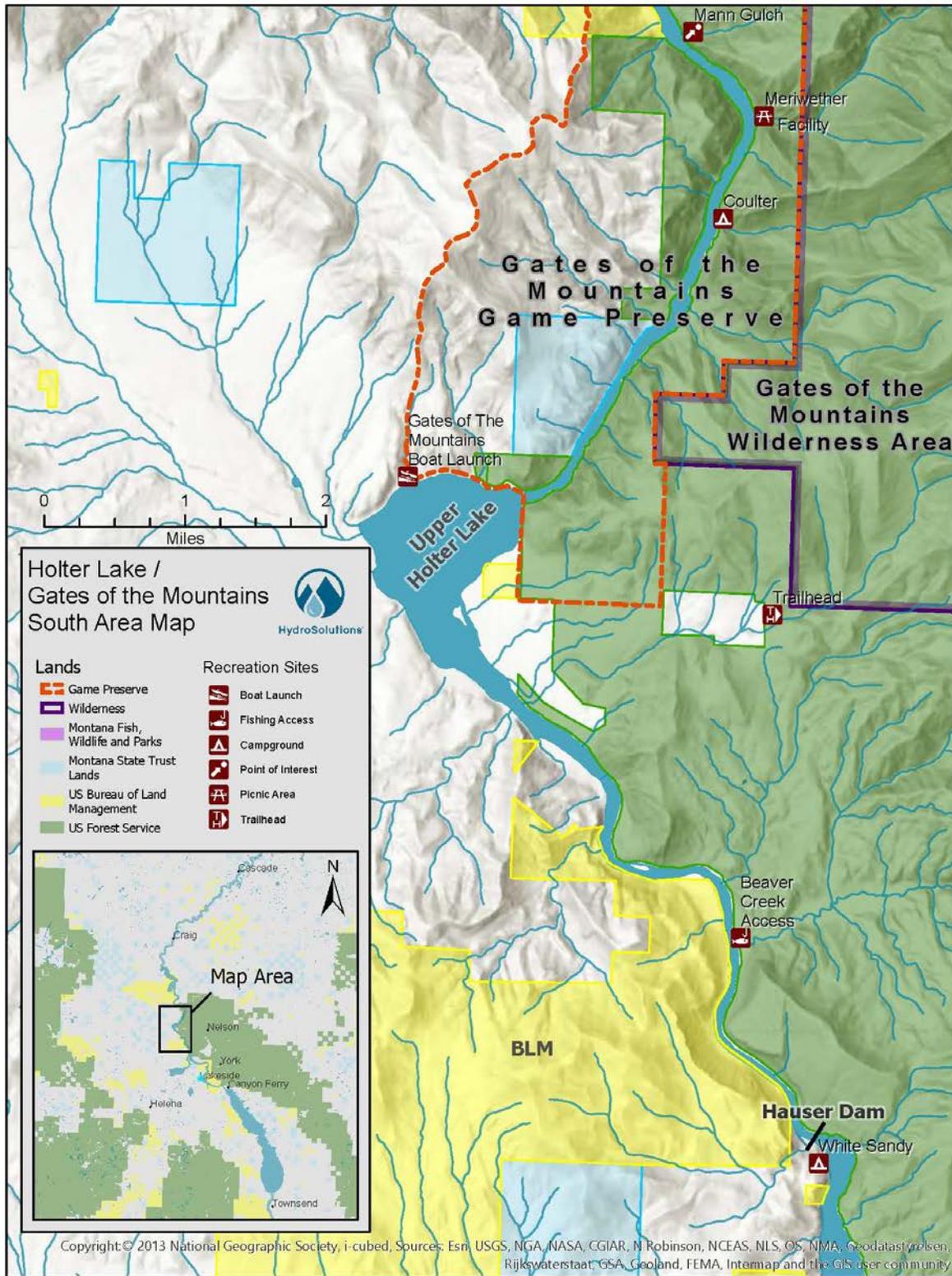


Figure 1-1. Southern Portion of the Holter Lake-Gates of the Mountains reach of the Missouri River showing public land management boundaries, recreation sites, and other landmarks.

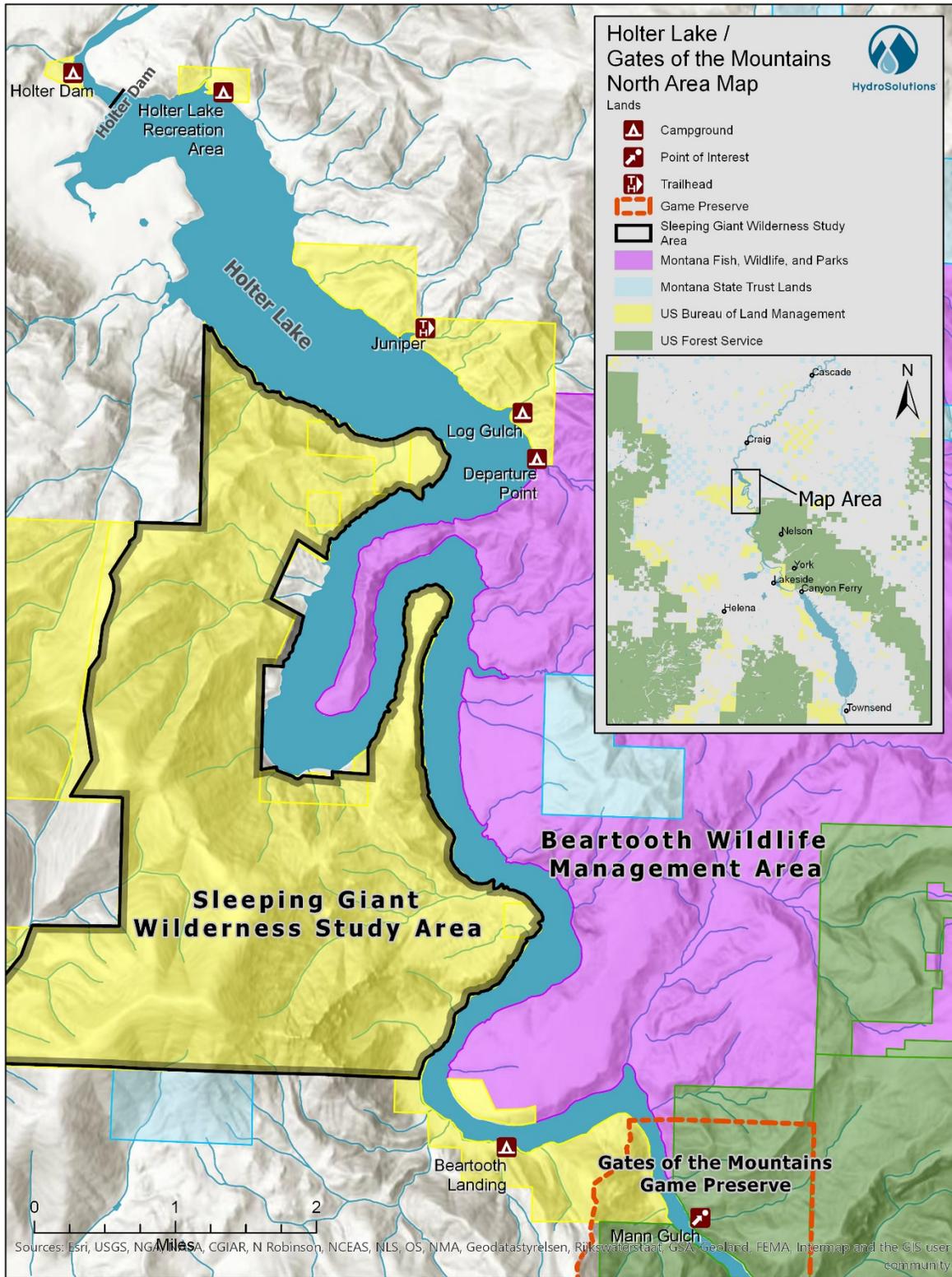


Figure 1-2. Northern Portion of the Holter Lake- Gates of the Mountains reach of the Missouri River showing public land management boundaries, recreation sites, and other landmarks.

1.6.1 Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest

The Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest administers lands in the Holter region. This region is within the Big Belts Geographic Area (GA). Approximately 50 percent of Forest Service lands located adjacent to the Missouri River in the region are managed to maintain and improve range vegetative conditions and forage production for livestock and elk. In addition, non-motorized dispersed recreation is supported by trails and trailhead facilities when compatible with area goals.

Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest lands lie on the east side of the river in the Upper Holter Lake area. In some areas, trails and other dispersed forms of recreation are supported. Helena Forest lands located adjacent to Upper Holter Lake and the Missouri River are managed to provide a variety of semi-primitive and primitive non-motorized recreation opportunities. The Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area encompasses 28,440 acres (USDA Forest Service 2018). Wilderness Areas are managed to support untrammled and undeveloped landscapes, natural processes, opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation, and any other features of value to the wilderness. These key qualities of wilderness character contribute to the public purposes for which the wilderness areas were designated.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classification for the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness area is “Primitive”. Visitor use may be restricted to prevent the loss of solitude. Recreation facilities are only permitted to preserve or enhance dispersed recreation opportunities and motorized vehicles are not allowed. However, the river corridor is outside of the Wilderness Area boundary and the ROS for the river corridor is Semi-Primitive Motorized River.

The Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan identified the Missouri River as a Sensitive Viewing Area that should be managed with the Visual Quality Objective of Retention. A revised scenery management system for the U.S. Forest Service indicates the Missouri River should be managed for Very High (Unaltered) Scenic Integrity.

1.6.2 Bureau of Land Management

The BLM Butte Field Office manages several recreation sites along the Missouri River including four on Holter Lake and the Beartooth Landing Campground upstream of Holter Lake near where the Gates of the Mountains cliffs transition to more open grassland landscape (See Section 4). The sites along Holter Lake have highly developed facilities and are staffed in the summer months. In addition, BLM relies heavily on volunteers to assist at the sites. For the 2018 season, volunteers donated 12,317 hours and 1,609 days to help keep these recreation sites functioning well and open to the public (BLM 2018).

1.6.3 Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) manages the fisheries and wildlife resources for the State. FWP establishes seasons and bag limits on the fish and wildlife resources; enforces the laws of the state of Montana related to fish, wildlife, and recreational use of public and private

lands; and monitors fish and wildlife populations. However, the fishing access sites within the boundaries of this CRRMP, including the site on Beaver Creek, are not maintained by FWP. FWP maintains fishing access sites north of Holter Dam as well as a State Park and fishing access on Hauser Dam, but these sites are outside of the planning area for this CRRMP.

FWP also manages the Beartooth WMA on the east side of the Missouri River from near the mouth of Willow Creek to the BLM's Log Gulch Campground (**Figure 1-2**). The Beartooth WMA is home to big game animals, upland game birds, songbirds, raptors, furbearers and numerous small mammals through much of the year. The WMA is closed to all visitation from the end of the big game hunting season until May 15 each year. Beartooth WMA was created to provide wildlife habitat for a variety of species, primarily elk, and to provide recreational opportunities.

The FWP website for the Beartooth WMA states, "Increased human usage at the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area south of Great Falls has led state officials to announce new camping rules. In recent years, the Beartooth WMA has become a busy place for public recreation from the May 15 opener through hunting in the fall. Thousands of people annually visit the WMA to camp, hike and horseback ride, enjoying the remarkable scenery and wildlife resources. FWP encourages this public use while working hard to maintain the WMA's purpose, which is to provide year-round and critical winter wildlife habitat. Overflow from nearby Holter Lake campgrounds, along with increased overall use in recent years, has led to crowding issues and extremely busy camp areas. Due to increased camp area abuse, litter, maintenance and staff time, FWP has established new camping rules which restrict camping to designated sites only, require camper registration, and impose a 16-day limit for occupancy. In addition, camps may not be left unattended for more than 48 hours" (MFWP 2018).

Most WMA users access the area in vehicles. It is unlikely that users access the area via boat on the Missouri River. FWP also implements and enforces the boating laws in Montana (ARM 12.11 and 12.8.212; 23-2-5, *et seq.* MCA). These laws cover many aspects related to public safety on waters such as the Missouri River as well as lake-specific regulations.

1.7 Management Authority

The three land management agencies described above share aspects of recreation management within the corridor. In addition, NorthWestern Energy has responsibilities under its license from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) related to the operation of its hydropower facilities within the corridor. This plan prioritizes projects and management strategies to facilitate recreation resource preservation and enhancement for all agencies.

2 Guiding Principles and Resource Values

Holter Lake and the Gates of the Mountains River Corridor provides unique recreational opportunities amongst quality ecological, historic, and economic resources. This Chapter provides an overview of the valuable resources and provides the baseline for discussing the ways to protect these values in the future.

2.1 Guiding Principles

To accompany the vision statement developed in cooperation with the stakeholder group, five guiding principles were identified for which goals and objectives were developed:

1. Recreational Opportunity
2. Conservation of Ecology
3. Cultural and Historical Integrity
4. Economic Opportunity
5. Public Safety

2.1.1 Recreational Opportunity

Recreation use of Holter Lake and the Gates of the Mountains corridor is year-round but particularly high during the summer months when water recreation is the most active throughout the area. A commercial tour boat operation offers boat trips on the river and there are a number of developed and dispersed recreation sites along the shoreline. The ROS for the area is Semi-Primitive Motorized which allows for a fairly high expectation of experiencing isolation from the sights and sounds of others (USDA Forest Service 2003). This area also provides access to the western portions of the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness.

2.1.1.1 Boating

Both motorized and non-motorized boating are popular recreational activities within the Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area. With access to Holter Reservoir and Upper Holter Lake Marina, boaters of all types visit the area to experience the scenery and the unique geologic, ecologic, and cultural on-water environment. In addition, in order to visit some of the river facilities, boating or hiking are the only ways to gain access to experience them. Boat docks are located at select on-water facilities, including Coulter campground and Meriwether Picnic Area. These docks have been recently upgraded. There is also a small dock at Beartooth Landing campground.

2.1.1.2 Angling

Holter Lake and the Gates of the Mountains River Corridor provides an abundance of fishing opportunities, and the Beaver Creek Access Site, specifically, provides unique fly-fishing opportunities, including both wade and float fishing. The river section between the Gates of the Mountains and Holter Reservoir, known as the “Land of the Giants”, is a high-quality rainbow and brown trout fishery. Other species present include brook trout, mountain whitefish, suckers, and kokanee, or land-locked salmon. In addition, because flows are controlled through the dam and reservoir management and are not as subject to spring runoff fluctuations, this area provides high-quality seasonal fishing from April through June and from September through November when other fisheries may not be productive. More information on the fishery resource is provided in Section 2.1.2.1 below.

2.1.1.3 Camping

The Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area has a variety of camping areas, including dispersed and primitive areas, and developed campsites at Coulter Campground. All the camping is accessible via hiking or boat-in access. There are also developed campsites at the BLM facilities on Holter Reservoir; Holter Lake Recreation Area, Beartooth Landing (boat-in only), Log Gulch and Departure Point Campground, which include both RV and tent camping accessible by car.

2.1.1.4 Commercial Uses

Commercial service providers are important to those who seek knowledge, skills, and access to the river corridor. The Helena Ranger District has had a long-standing business relationship with the non-profit Gates of the Mountains, Inc., who provide boat tours of the Gates corridor. These tours have been stopping at Meriwether and Coulter campgrounds for many years, inviting the public to explore the area or picnic at the site before catching a ride back to shore on a later tour. The tour boats make the Meriwether and Coulter areas accessible to members of the general public that do not have access to private boats.

In addition, there are a number of outfitters that provide fishing guide services within the Gates of the Mountains and Upper Holter Lake area's unique fisheries. More information on outfitters and guides is provided in Section 2.1.4.

2.1.1.5 Hiking and Backpacking

There is an extensive network of trails that provide users opportunities to hike and backpack into the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area. There are approximately 53 miles of trails in the Gates of the Mountains 28,562-acre Wilderness area, some of which are located in lower and drier elevations making them suitable for spring trips when other areas are still under snow. This network of trails can be reached from several access points; Big Log, Hunters Gulch and Refrigerator Canyon trailheads, most of which are in the Beaver Creek drainage, both above and below the old town of Nelson.

2.1.1.6 Hunting

Most of the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest provides a variety of excellent hunting opportunities for big game, upland birds, and waterfowl. However, within the Gates of the Mountains Game Preserve, located adjacent to the Missouri River and Gates of the Mountains Wilderness, all hunting is prohibited (**Figures 1-1 and 1-2**). The game preserve extends on both sides of the river from the lower end of Upper Holter Lake where the Gates of the Mountains canyon begins, downstream to approximately where Willow Creek flows into the Missouri River. The west side of the river covered in this CRRMP outside of the game preserve falls in FWP Hunting District 339. This area includes lands managed by BLM.

The Beartooth WMA, located on the east side of the river, extends downstream from Willow Creek to the BLM boundary along Holter Reservoir and is part of FWP Hunting District 455 (**Figure 1-2**). Hunting is allowed in the Beartooth WMA subject to current regulations.

2.1.1.7 Other Recreational Values

Although overall use is lower in the winter months, there are a variety of winter recreational values within the planning area including ice-fishing and ice-skating on Holter Lake.

2.1.2 Conservation of Ecology

Fish, wildlife, geology, vegetation, and the water itself are outstanding natural resource values that contribute to the recreational experience within the Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area. The following sections describe how these resources enhance the river recreation experience.

2.1.2.1 Fisheries and Aquatic Resources

Holter Lake and the Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area are popular fishing destinations in the spring and fall. Ice fishing is also a popular activity during winter. The area is home to several native fish species, including game and non-game species. Anglers visit the area to fish for these as well as the non-native game fish present in the Missouri River. The reservoirs provide warm and coldwater habitat and tributary streams provide spawning areas for some of the trout species. **Table 2-1** lists the fish species sampled by FWP in annual surveys in Holter Reservoir and the Missouri River upstream of Holter Reservoir.

Common Name	Family	Scientific Name	Class	Native to MT?
Burbot	Codfish	<i>Lota lota</i>	Coldwater	Native
Common Carp	Minnow	<i>Cyprinus carpio</i>	Warmwater	Introduced
Fathead Minnow	Minnow	<i>Pimephales promelas</i>	Warmwater	Native
Utah Chub	Minnow	<i>Gila atraria</i>		Introduced
Walleye	Perch	<i>Stizostedion vitreum</i>	Warmwater	Introduced
Yellow Perch	Perch	<i>Perca flavescens</i>	Warmwater	Introduced
Northern Pike	Pike	<i>Esox lucius</i>	Warmwater	Introduced
Mottled Sculpin	Sculpin	<i>Cottus bairdi</i>		Native
Longnose Sucker	Sucker	<i>Catostomus catostomus</i>	Warmwater	Native
White Sucker	Sucker	<i>Catostomus commersoni</i>	Warmwater	Native
Brook Trout	Trout	<i>Salvelinus fontinalis</i>	Coldwater	Introduced
Brown Trout	Trout	<i>Salmo trutta</i>	Coldwater	Introduced
Kokanee	Trout	<i>Oncorhynchus nerka</i>	Coldwater	Introduced
Mountain Whitefish	Trout	<i>Prosopium williamsoni</i>	Coldwater	Native
Rainbow Trout	Trout	<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss</i>	Coldwater	Introduced
Westslope Cutthroat Trout	Trout	<i>Oncorhynchus clarki lewisii</i>	Coldwater	Native

FWP stocks rainbow trout into Holter Reservoir annually. Holter Dam is managed as a “run of river” hydropower project as is Hauser Dam immediately upstream, which means that they strive to maintain a consistent flow from Canyon Ferry through to Holter Lake and downstream rather than prioritizing water storage from season to season. This creates relatively consistent water levels in the mainstem river. The dams create consistent flows and trap sediment which alters the in-river conditions and has allowed coldwater fish like trout to flourish. Tributary streamflows

remain uncontrolled and have flow regimes that are dictated by annual snowpack and spring runoff.

Holter Reservoir and the riverine stretches upstream are popular angling destinations. Boat launch sites allow easy access for people with their own watercraft and outfitters provide guiding services for visitors. Upper Holter Lake is also the launch location for the area of the Missouri River now known as “The Land of the Giants”. The rainbow and brown trout are able to live most of the year in the larger, fertile reservoir, where they can feed and grow. These fish then migrate to spawn in the shallower river section above Upper Holter Lake up to the outflow from Hauser Dam. Beaver Creek is a tributary that these fish target and anglers often congregate near its mouth to fish for these large, healthy fish.

2.1.2.2 Wildlife and Terrestrial Resources

Ospreys, eagles (bald and golden), vultures and falcons (peregrine and prairie) frequent the area and nest in the high cliffs and tall pine trees along the river. Osprey and eagles are attracted to the area to hunt for fish. The cliffs are also excellent habitat for bat species native to Montana. The canyon areas provide diverse habitats attractive to many of Montana's iconic species such as elk, otters, deer, ermine, beaver, mountain lions, black bears, bighorn sheep and mountain goats. Hunting and wildlife watching are a big draw for visitors to the Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area. A search of the Montana Natural Heritage Program’s database yielded 15 Species of Special Concern (SOC) known to occur in the area (MNHP 2019), as shown in **Table 2-2**.

MT Status	Species Group	Common Name	Scientific Name	Habitat	Resident/ Migratory
SOC	Amphibians	Western Toad	<i>Anaxyrus boreas</i>	Wetlands, floodplain pools	Year Round
SSS	Birds	Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	Riparian forest	Year Round
SOC	Birds	Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>	Moist conifer forests	Year Round
SOC	Birds	Clark's Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga columbiana</i>	Conifer forest	Year Round
SOC	Birds	Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	Grasslands	Year Round
SOC	Birds	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	Riparian forest	Year Round
SOC	Birds	Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>	Grasslands	Migratory Summer Breeder
SOC	Birds	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Cliffs / canyons	Year Round
SOC	Birds	Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>	Moist conifer forests	Year Round
SOC	Fish	Westslope Cutthroat Trout	<i>Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi</i>	Mountain streams, rivers, lakes	Year Round
SOC	Mammals	Hoary Bat	<i>Lasiurus cinereus</i>	Riparian and forest	Migratory Summer Breeder

Table 2-2. Montana Species of Special Concern observed in and around the Missouri River area between Hauser Dam and Holter Dam.

MT Status	Species Group	Common Name	Scientific Name	Habitat	Resident/Migratory
SOC	Mammals	Little Brown Myotis	<i>Myotis lucifugus</i>	Generalist	Year Round
SOC	Mammals	Spotted Bat	<i>Euderma maculatum</i>	Cliffs with rock crevices	Migratory Summer Breeder
SOC	Mammals	Townsend's Big-eared Bat	<i>Corynorhinus townsendii</i>	Caves in forested habitats	Year Round
SOC	Vascular Plants	Lesser Rushy Milkvetch	<i>Astragalus convallarius</i>	Grasslands - Intermountain	Present
IAH	Other	Bat Roost (Non-Cave)	Bat Roost (Non-Cave)		Species or Habitat Group

Status definitions – Animals:
 SOC species of special concern in Montana
 SSS Special Status Species- species that have some legal protections in place, but are otherwise not Montana Species of Concern. Bald Eagle is a Special Status Species because, although it is no longer protected under the Endangered Species Act and is also no longer a Montana Species of Concern, it is still protected under the [Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940](#) (16 U.S.C. 668-668c).

Status definitions – Plants:
 IAH Important Animal Habitat

2.1.2.3 Geology

The prominent gray cliffs along the Missouri River in the Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area are formed by Madison Limestone. The cliffs that form the Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area span about 5.75 miles in length and rise about 1,000 feet above the water. Within the canyon, caves and folded layers of Madison Limestone are found. Millions of years ago, the river carved through softer rocks which set its course once harder rock layers were encountered. The gorge is carved into rocks of Mississippian age, predominantly the Mission Canyon Limestone, which was deposited 325 million years ago when a shallow sea occupied much of Montana. This limestone was folded when the Rocky Mountains were being formed 70 to 65 million years ago, and great slabs of rock were thrust up and over other rocks. The high cliffs provide a unique canyon environment and spectacular scenery for boaters and hikers who frequent the area (Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology 2019).

2.1.2.4 Open Space and Aesthetics

The surrounding Gates of the Mountains Wilderness Area and predominantly publicly-owned landscape provide opportunities for land and water-based recreation year-round. Although motorized craft are common along this reach of the Missouri River, the area retains its primitive appearance for much of its length and recreational facilities are provided at intervals that allow for low encounter rates among parties much of the year. Access points are spaced to allow for day use or multi-day trips. The variety of recreational opportunities and the unspoiled nature of much of the corridor was stressed by the stakeholder group as an important quality. A desire to preserve or enhance the primitive nature and aesthetic value of the area remains a priority.

2.1.3 Cultural and Historical Integrity

The Missouri River Corridor has much historic and cultural significance. The term “Gates of the Mountains” was first used by Captain Meriwether Lewis in 1805 to describe the scenic and unique cliffs. Captain Lewis and Second Lieutenant William Clark passed through the corridor en route to the Pacific Ocean and back in 1805-06. The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, a nationally designated trail, is located in the bottom of the corridor. Additionally, the Mann Gulch Wildfire Historic Landscape is located within the Gates of the Mountains river corridor area. This historic landscape is recognized on the National Register of Historic Places and memorializes the loss of 13 smokejumper fire fighters during the August 5, 1949 Mann Gulch fire.

In addition, there are a variety of cultural and ethnographic resources along the planning area, including Native American pictographs painted among rock walls within the Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area.

2.1.4 Economic Opportunity

Waterways and the recreation they support are an important part of Montana’s tourism. The State of Montana developed an office of outdoor recreation because of the importance of outdoor recreation to the State’s economy. Montana’s outdoor spaces, including approximately 170,000 miles of rivers, are part of our national identity, and the backdrop for opportunity. Montana’s outdoor recreation industry accounts for \$7.1 billion in consumer spending and more than 71,000 jobs—the 2nd largest sector of the state’s economy. The benefits to Montana’s economy are not limited to revenues or jobs. Montana’s natural landscapes define a lifestyle that attracts and fuels thriving businesses from all sectors—which makes Montana a premier location for entrepreneurial start-ups or business relocation (Montana Governors Office of Economic Development 2019).

2.1.4.1 *Outfitting and Guided Trips*

Gates of the Mountains, Inc.

The Gates of the Mountains, Inc. operates a boat marina in Upper Holter Lake as well as seasonal boat tours of the canyon area. Boat tours have been provided from this site for many decades, and the tour operation provides jobs as well as recreational opportunities. The tour company has two large boats that can accommodate up to 30 passengers at a time. The larger boat has an onboard restroom. Boat tours last approximately two hours and stop at Meriwether Picnic Area to give passengers the opportunity to hike, picnic, or access the docks for fishing. The marina includes private slips as well as a boat launch that the public can access for a small fee and an extensive parking area. The marina consists of 144 private docks ranging in size from 20 to 30 feet. The 30-foot slips have shore power. All the slips have wings on both sides to facilitate mooring. The marina maintains an on-site manager who serves as a security guard. Overnight mooring or camping is not permitted for public users, but there is a gate that allows users to exit after regular working hours.

Commercial Fishing Outfitters

The Montana Board of Outfitters (Board) sets experience, qualification, and testing requirements for licensing outfitters. Guides are licensed via experience, education, or qualifications and must initially be sponsored by a licensed outfitter. All applicants must be 18 years of age, possess a Montana FWP Conservation License, and a valid, hands-on first aid certification from a Board-approved course for initial licensure (MBO 2019). Licensed outfitters and guides pay a fee to the Board and are required to list any permits they may hold on an operation plan on file with the Board. They are also required to submit annual reports of each client, each waterway, and each section of waterway by date, but these data are not collated or reported at this time (Gallus 2019). A licensed fishing guide may guide on any water in Montana, with a few exceptions. Guiding on the Missouri is not limited or subject to any special permit requirements at this time. The relatively consistent flows on the Holter Lake and Gates of the Mountains reach is attractive to anglers and guides in the spring season when runoff can make other rivers turbid or too swift to fish successfully. Some guides may focus on this reach for their business, but there is no way to reliably quantify how many guides or clients use this reach annually.

Public anglers and fishing guides can launch at the Gates of the Mountains Boat Launch Area in Upper Holter Lake, the BLM recreation sites near Holter Dam or at any other public river access point. As described in section 2.1.2, the river reach near Beaver Creek is popular with anglers because of the large fish present, and is known locally as “The Land of the Giants”. Fishing on the reservoir stretches is also popular and the diversity of fish species and successful angling methods broadens the area’s appeal to fly and spin anglers.

2.1.4.2 Power Generation and Transmission

Holter Dam was constructed in 1904 for the purpose of generating electric power and has limited storage capacity. The dam – along with the eight other dams in the Missouri-Madison Hydroelectric Project (FERC #2188) - was historically owned and operated by the Montana Power Company; however, the dams were purchased by PPL Montana in 1999 and then in 2014 by NorthWestern Energy.

Holter Dam is a four-unit hydroelectric plant on the Missouri River, about 43 miles northeast of Helena. The units have a total generating capacity of 48 megawatts. It is considered a “run-of-river” project because it can generate electricity using the water that flows down the river, without the need to store additional water supplies.

2.1.5 Public Safety

Recreation users and boaters are responsible for their own safety, but land management agencies can provide education and outreach to help users make better informed decisions when recreating in the area. Part of this outreach could include materials or signage to educate users about the river environment, safety, recreation opportunities, “Leave No Trace” ethics, and how to avoid negative environmental impacts. Knowing about river and boating safety and associated rules and recommendations helps all users experience a safer and more fun experience.

Topics for river use and camping safety include:

- Changing weather conditions
- Watercraft operation, speed, and maneuverability
- Motorized and non-motorized watercraft interactions
- Limit or restrict glass containers on the river,
- Proper disposal of human waste (pack-out requirements at dispersed camping areas),
- Fire safety,
- Consequences of overconsumption of alcohol,
- Traffic and parking,
- Natural hazards like high flows, waves, wind, debris and snags, cold temperatures, and
- Life jackets.

3 Recreation Management Approach

This chapter provides the steps for managing the Holter Lake and recreation areas into the future. These areas are included in the Missouri-Madison Comprehensive Recreation Plan that was prepared by NorthWestern Energy in 2016 to fulfill their Project 2188 FERC license responsibilities (NorthWestern Energy 2016). Therefore, a recreation management approach that works within the parameters of existing public plans is already in place and this CRRMP will ensure consistency with this management approach of the specific plan area into the future, while defining future management actions that could be used to address current recreation management concerns and issues.

This CRRMP addresses the desired conditions, both generally and specifically per facility along the corridor, the process that will be used to determine whether the desired conditions are being met and identifies strategies and design specifications that will allow the managing agencies (Forest Service and BLM) to manage these sites sustainability into the future. Although the CRRMP will not create, authorize, or execute any specific ground-breaking activities, the plan will help to identify some immediate needs for reaching desired conditions at a variety of sites.

3.1 Management Approach

3.1.1 Desired Conditions

The overall goal of the Holter Lake and Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area management plan is to provide safe and well managed recreation sites and dispersed use areas that provide enjoyable user experiences across a spectrum of opportunities and seasons. The Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest is currently in the process of revising their Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 2018), which describes the Desired Conditions (DC) of the Missouri River corridor, including this planning area, as follows:

Desired Conditions (BB-MISCOR-DC)

- 01 - The developed recreation settings and opportunities along the Missouri River corridor are ecologically sustainable and recreational user conflicts are minimized.
- 02 - The setting and recreation opportunities along the Missouri River Corridor maintain the natural scenic beauty of the river while seeking ways to enhance, protect, and improve the largely natural appearing scenic quality of the canyon's visual corridor.
- 03 - The historic and cultural features of the Missouri River corridor are protected and enhanced. Where appropriate, interpretation is provided for forest visitors to enhance their experience(s) of the area.
- 04 - Travelers within the Missouri River Corridor have opportunities to learn about the 1806 Lewis and Clark Expedition, the Mann Gulch Fire, and to experience and appreciate the unique natural environment of the area. Trailside interpretation and related visitor information services enhance visitor appreciation of the outdoors, the natural resources, scenery, and cultural and historic values within the corridor.
- 05 - Existing or future developed recreation sites accommodate increased recreational use in the corridor while protecting the unique and important natural resources and historic and cultural features within the area.
- 06 - Dispersed recreation opportunities along the river corridor allow for exploration and discovery with minimal environmental impacts and user conflicts.

Specific desired recreation and resource conditions are defined for each of the facilities and recreational opportunities within the planning area (Section 4). These are the conditions that the public expects to experience or encounter when recreating within the planning area. Establishing desired conditions is a critical part of managing recreation because they establish a recreation management vision for each of the facilities within the planning area. These are the conditions that management decisions should strive to achieve.

3.1.2 Indicators and Standards

The concepts of Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) together form the adaptive management framework that includes objective evaluation of resource conditions relative to adopted standards. These tools are utilized by the USFS, BLM, and other federal agencies in developing and implementing management strategies on lands they currently manage. The process is widely accepted and used by public agency resource specialists on Federal lands.

Public land managers for the CRRMP area have already determined important characteristics that should be monitored as indicators of change, and established thresholds with potential management actions to remedy unacceptable situations, under a modified LAC/ROS concept that more appropriately addressed developed recreation areas. These indicators and thresholds are summarized in Appendix D of the Missouri-Madison Comprehensive Recreation Plan (NorthWestern Energy 2016).

3.1.3 Monitoring

It is important to monitor the actual conditions of the planning area facilities to assess whether or not they are desirable and acceptable according to the adopted indicators and standards. Through monitoring, the managing agencies can determine when it is time to implement some type of management action to improve conditions.

Results of recreation site condition monitoring are reported for sites in the Plan area through the annual Recreation Site Maintenance and Management Questionnaire (also known as the Managers' Survey) and Recreation Visitor Studies conducted at regular intervals. These results are published in the Missouri-Madison Recreation Site Limits of Acceptable Change Monitoring Reports (Pinnacle Research 2019) and the Missouri-Madison Project Recreation Visitor Study Reports (Pinnacle Research 2015). Many elements of the Managers Survey and Recreation Visitor Study are tied directly to the Limits of Acceptable Change indicators and thresholds established by the Missouri-Madison Comprehensive Recreation Plan (NorthWestern Energy 2016). In addition, some items do not have established thresholds, but are reported for informational purposes only. In addition to the monitoring efforts described above, there is also an annual collection of Visitor Use Counts for many facilities in the planning area that monitor the volume of visitor activity at recreation sites (Research 2019). This management plan describes these existing methods for monitoring conditions and continued monitoring into the future.

3.2 Routine Management Actions

There are a variety of management actions that BLM and USFS will continue to implement to manage recreation within the planning area. These include:

- Continued data collection – This would include the annual Managers Survey data, Visitor Survey data, and annual Visitor Use Counts for certain facilities within the planning area. Additional management actions could be to increase the frequency of visitor survey data, as well as including additional sites for Visitor Use Counts, if warranted by the results and thresholds established.
- Site maintenance and protection – the Forest Service currently provides routine maintenance and inspections of facilities within the Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area, including Coulter Campground, Meriwether Picnic Area, Mann Gulch Historic District, Beaver Creek Access Site, and a variety of dispersed camping areas. The Forest Service has a dedicated staff member, the Meriwether Guard, who provides daily inspections and necessary maintenance, trash removal, fire ring re-establishment, limited vegetation control, campsite maintenance, and toilet maintenance. However, this is limited to only the Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area and facilities managed by the Forest Service. Shared management between BLM and Forest Service of Beartooth Landing could be an added management action as a result of this CRRMP.

4 Holter Lake and Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area - Facilities, Settings & Desired Conditions

Holter Lake and the Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area provide exceptional settings that attract a variety of visitors and facilitate unique recreation experiences. Therefore, defining desired conditions of recreation sites within the corridor can be a challenging task as each user may have different desires to meet their expectations. Since the planning area has historically provided a diverse set of settings and opportunities, desired conditions are described for each facility or site individually. This allows for management of different conditions, in turn providing a variety of opportunities for various experiences, uses, and user groups in the corridor.

4.1 Desired Conditions for Developed Recreation Sites

The Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan (USDA Forest Service 2018) describes developed recreation sites as destination locations and sites that act as portals to adjacent recreation settings and opportunities, including campgrounds, trailheads, airstrips, etc. Developed recreation sites have infrastructure or constructed facilities that have been designed to safeguard public health and safety, protect the natural environment, and facilitate visitor comfort and positive experiences. A wide variety of quality, well-maintained developed recreation sites exist at key locations to accommodation concentrations of use. These sites include campgrounds, picnic areas, interpretive sites, and trailheads that provide visitor amenities such as picnic facilities, potable water and vault toilets.

Facility-Specific Desired Conditions: The following section provides descriptions of the existing setting, desired conditions of the specific facilities, and the key considerations to maintain the desired conditions at each of the developed recreation sites.

4.1.1 Coulter Campground

Existing Setting: Located on Forest Service lands within the Holter Lake and Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area, Coulter Campground is only accessible by boat or hiking along the scenic river trail #257 (**Figure 4-1**). The first come-first serve campground contains seven (7) developed campsites, each with a fire ring. A newly improved dock system, potable water, and information kiosk, and a vault toilet are also available on site. The campground, located within the scenic river canyon, provides excellent opportunities for wildlife viewing and geologic discovery, and serves groups camping from a boat or hiking down through the canyon on the access trail.

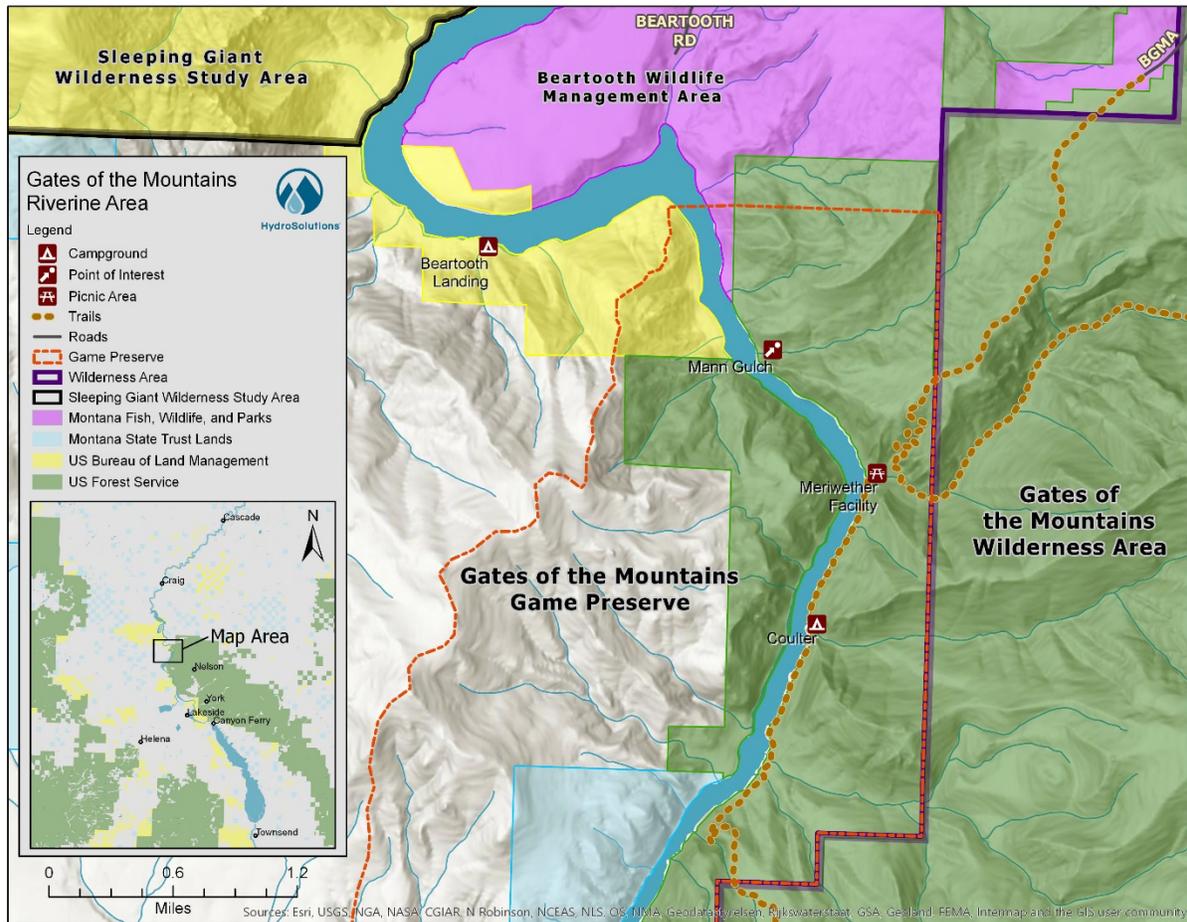


Figure 4-1. Area surrounding the Gates of the Mountains reach of the Missouri River showing land management, access routes, and topography.

Desired Conditions: Coulter Campground, being only accessible by boat or hiking, provides a sense of remoteness in a semi-primitive, motorized setting. Visitors enjoy this facility because of the minimally-developed nature and the separated campsites. Coulter Campground provides a retreat into nature and although socialization outside individual groups is not important, the presence of others is expected and tolerated because group size is generally small.

Maintaining the uncrowded feel of Coulter is of primary importance, so increasing the capacity of the site, if deemed necessary, should be done with this concept in mind. Since Coulter offers the only source of potable water at boat-in sites within the planning area, maintaining the water system is also of primary importance. Continuing to provide a comfort station will keep sanitation issues related to human waste to a minimum (and thus reducing resource impacts), and maintaining docks and trails will ensure access into the future. With no garbage service available at the site, visitors should be reminded to engage in pack-it-in/pack-it-out behaviors through postings.

The degree of naturalness of this site is one main draw for visitors, providing an experience that has a moderate to high degree of solitude in a very natural setting. Therefore, development beyond what is currently available at the site should be avoided unless it intends to incrementally improve the amenities that currently exist. Permanent structures (picnic pavilions, etc.) should be avoided. However, because the site interfaces with wild lands, postings on the kiosk about proper food storage and keeping a clean camp will help to reduce undesirable visitor-wildlife encounters.

Key Considerations to maintaining the desired conditions at Coulter Campground include:

1. Continued management of existing camping areas to provide a sense of solitude in a natural setting, including routine litter clean-up and fire ring cleaning, vegetation management, and erosion control.
2. Development of additional camping areas should be considered if warranted and supported by visitor use.
3. Protection of ecological resources.
4. Modernization of the water management system.
5. Increased public safety and security during peak use.

4.1.2 Beaver Creek Access Site

Existing Setting: The Beaver Creek Access Site is located at the west end of Forest Service Road 138, adjacent to Beaver Creek where it joins the Missouri River (**Figure 4-2**). The site includes a hardened, gravel parking area for up to 17 passenger vehicles, shoreline access foot paths, a single vault toilet, interpretive signage, and a bulletin board. Forest Service trail 254 begins at this site and parallels the Missouri River between Beaver Creek and Hauser Dam. Along this route, birds such as osprey, bald eagles, great blue herons, American white pelicans and the double-crested cormorant are frequently spotted.

The segment of the Missouri River accessed by the Beaver Creek Access Site has been designated as a Class I, Blue Ribbon sport fishery. The river provides important spawning habitat to brown trout, rainbow trout, kokanee, and mountain whitefish. Beaver Creek is the principal spawning stream for Holter that supports substantial runs of rainbow trout.

The site can be accessed by vehicle or boat; however, there are no dock facilities. Boats typically launch at the Gates of the Mountains, Inc., publicly-available, fee boat launch. Vehicles travel Forest Road 138. The last three miles of Forest Service Road 138 are not maintained for sedan-type vehicles and is designated as primitive road.

The Beaver Creek area in general is popular for overnight dispersed camping during the spring, summer, and fall months. This camping generally occurs in areas along Beaver Creek between the historic town of Nelson and the river access site and it is a mix of car camping and trailer camping. Neither camping nor overnight parking are allowed at the Beaver Creek Access Site itself. This undesignated use has resulted in resource impacts along Beaver Creek.

Use of the site is heaviest in the early part of the peak recreation season (from mid-April through early July) when the rainbow trout are spawning and in the fall when the brown trout are spawning; users expect to encounter many people on any day of the week. Use of the site during the rest of July and August and during the winter months is generally quite low and users do not expect to encounter many other people at this site.

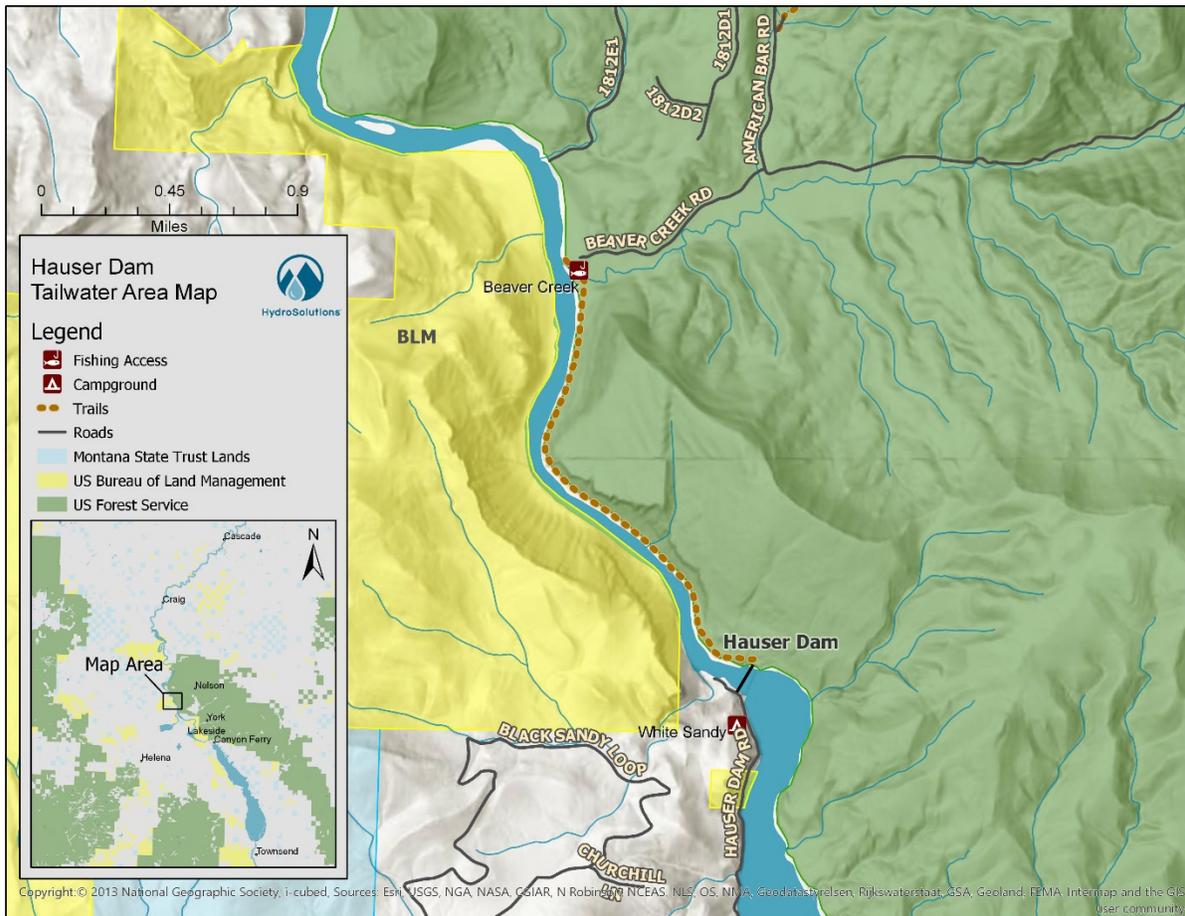


Figure 4-2. Area surrounding the Beaver Creek Access Site showing land management, access routes, and topography.

Desired Conditions: This site is attractive for day-use and weekend visitors from nearby communities, short term campers and large groups. There are opportunities to experience natural resources, but the presence of other visitors is expected. Camping is in designated, developed sites and day-use parking accommodates the high use months. Development of and improvements to this site are completed within five years. The ecological integrity of Beaver Creek is maintained while providing recreational opportunities for the public. This site serves as a conservation education clearinghouse for anglers and campers to learn about the natural resources, the river ecosystem and dam safety.

Key Considerations to maintaining the desired conditions at the Beaver Creek Access Site:

- Manage this site for high, concentrated use during spring and fall, and moderately high use during the summer.
- Install American with Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant double vault toilet
- Improve footpaths and replace existing foot bridge
- Develop visitor information panels addressing dam safety, boat safety, food storage and pack it in/pack it out.
- Explore opportunity to develop an ADA compliant fishing pier.
- Closely monitor for natural resource degradation, social conditions and visitor satisfaction.
- Maintain access for wading anglers while mitigating bank erosion and social trail development.
- Implement all phases of the Beaver Creek river restoration project
- Collect recreation use data to help inform recreation management decision on camping numbers and demand. Explore and pursue opportunities for a designated campground.

4.1.3 Meriwether Picnic Area

Existing Setting: The Meriwether Picnic Area is located on public land managed by the Helena National Forest, in the Gates of the Mountains corridor of Holter Reservoir (**Figure 4-1**). The boat-in day-use site offers 10 picnic tables, a picnic shelter, four single vault toilets, interpretive displays, trails, and a caretaker's cabin.

The only motorized access to the site is via the Missouri River, and five boat docks are available for private watercraft. Overnight camping is not permitted at the site, nor is overnight use of the boat docks. Overnight camping is permitted and encouraged at Coulter Campground, accessible via foot or boat one mile south of Meriwether. The site is occasionally accessed via non-motorized trails, 11 miles from the Big Log (252/253) or Hunter's Gulch (255/253) trailheads. High numbers of boats and visitors use the site June, July, and August. There is only occasional use in the late spring and early fall.

There is also a commercial boat dock the Gates of the Mountains, Inc. tour boats are authorized to use from May through September. This commercial operation allows passengers to disembark the tour boat if they choose.

The Meriwether site is an access point to the Mann Gulch Wildfire Historic District, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1999, under Criterion A:has both contributing and non-contributing features, including the Mann Gulch, the Rescue Gulch, Mouth of Meriwether Canyon, and Forest Trail #258 (USDA Forest Service 2014).

A two mile walk on Trail 258 leads visitors to the Mann Gulch memorials. The Meriwether site has interpretive panels and a memorial plaque. The Forest Service is working to make

Meriwether the primary access to Mann Gulch and lower visitation from the mouth of Mann Gulch itself.

Much of the area in and around the Meriwether site was impacted by the 2007 Meriwether Fire. During a thunderstorm in August of 2008 and a storm in 2009, the entire picnic area site was flooded. Due to loss of stabilizing vegetation because of the fire, a large amount of material from the gulch sluffed off steep topography, depositing three to five feet of material at the mouth of the gulch which covered most of the Meriwether site, the water system, swimming area, and trails. The site was closed to the public from 2008 until 2013 but no significant restoration work was completed. In the past five years, work has been completed to restore access to the vault toilets, visitor trails, picnic tables, and caretaker's cabin. The picnic shelter, grills, and the water system have not been restored or repaired, nor have plans been made to abandon these features. The large amount of material deposited against the pavilion will require excavation and redistribution nearby to maintain potential cultural artifacts that may have been moved, deposited, or buried in the material flow.

Desired Conditions: The Meriwether Picnic Area provides an opportunity to enjoy a day on the water and a break on shore, providing safe, shady rest areas, group picnic areas and opportunities to take short hikes. The area sustains consistent use in the summer, so does not often provide a sense of solitude but does allow a relatively primitive experience for those who visit the area on a day trip. Meriwether is the primary access point to the historical Mann Gulch area and also provides rich interpretive materials for visitors. The Gates of the Mountains, Inc. boat tour stop here and encourage patrons to explore the site. The dock is ADA accessible and accommodates day users as well as boat tour traffic.

The picnic pavilion is in need of stabilization and repair, and the potable water system should be restored. Interpretive information developed for description of wildfire in a natural setting and its effects on the environment would be beneficial. It is important to restore the utility of the water system and replace or excavate the partially buried picnic amenities.

Key Considerations to maintaining the desired conditions at the Meriwether Picnic Area: Due to the damage of the facility from the 2007 Meriwether Fire, there is a need for major repairs of the picnic area to allow for safe, continued use by a high amount of visitors. The large amount of material from the gulch sluffed off steep topography causing 3 to 5 feet of material to accumulate at the mouth of the gulch, covering most of the Meriwether site, its recreational water system and trails, including filling of the swimming area. The pavilion that is the centerpiece of the Meriwether site now has cobble material at the base of the walls that needs to be removed and the pavilion repaired. The creek channel in the gulch needs to be reestablished at the mouth of the gulch to accommodate the drainage.

- Manage this site for high, concentrated summer use
- Improve the trail to Mann Gulch
- Develop visitor information panels addressing dam safety, boat safety, food storage and pack it in/pack it out

- Modernization of waste management system
- Closely monitor for natural resource degradation, social conditions and visitor satisfaction
- Preservation of the Mann Gulch Wildfire Historic District features
- Implement a stabilization project on the picnic pavilion
- Remove buried amenities
- Restore potable water system
- Collect recreation use data to help inform recreation management decision on camping numbers and demand
- Provide for interpretation on fire effects on a natural landscape.

4.1.4 Beartooth Landing Campground

Existing Setting: This boat-in only primitive campground is located on BLM property south of BLM's Sleeping Giant Wilderness Study Area and just downstream of the Holter Lake and Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area (**Figure 4-1**). Facilities include seven (7) un-designated campsites, a vault toilet, a small boat dock, informational signs and trails, many of which are user-created.

Desired Conditions: The Beartooth Landing Campground offers a peaceful, tranquil camping experience with minimal management presence. Campsites are rustic and although semi-developed, they are more primitive in nature than the other “developed” campgrounds within the CRRMP area and the visitors to this campground are traveling farther from the main facilities of the Gates of the Mountains to receive a desired sense of solitude and remoteness, while enjoying the serene natural beauty with views of the Sleeping Giant.

Key Considerations to maintaining the desired conditions at the Beartooth Landing

Campground: This site's location and access method make it difficult for the BLM to maintain and manage. Currently the Forest Service periodically collects trash and walks through the site to look for issues and assess the facilities. The site has been receiving poor sanitation results from the annual Managers' Survey (Pinnacle Research 2019), which provides a basis for the need for management improvements of this facility.

4.1.5 Holter Lake Recreation Area

The Holter Lake recreation area includes several BLM-managed public recreation sites (**Figure 4-3**) on Holter Lake. These sites are highly developed, and facilities include hardened sites, bathrooms with running water, picnic areas, and site hosts or regular staff presence during the summer season. Camping fees are normally charged from mid-May through mid-October and there is a camping limit of seven (7) days from Memorial Day through Labor Day weekends. Although group sites can be reserved in advance, individual campsites are available on a first-come first-served basis; they are not part of the recreation.gov online reservation system. The BLM is pursuing a pilot of the reservation system for the summer of 2019 for some of the areas. The areas in the Holter Lake area covered in this CRRMP include Holter Lake campground, Departure Point, and Log Gulch campground (**Figure 4-3**). The Recreation Opportunity

Spectrum (ROS) designation for the east shore of Holter Lake is “Rural” and it is managed for developed camping and day-use activities, lake access for motorized boating, fishing, swimming, picnicking, and group gatherings (BLM 2008). The Sleeping Giant Wilderness Study Area along the west shore of Holter Lake and upstream along the Missouri River is considered undeveloped and is managed as an ROS of Semi-Primitive Non-motorized.

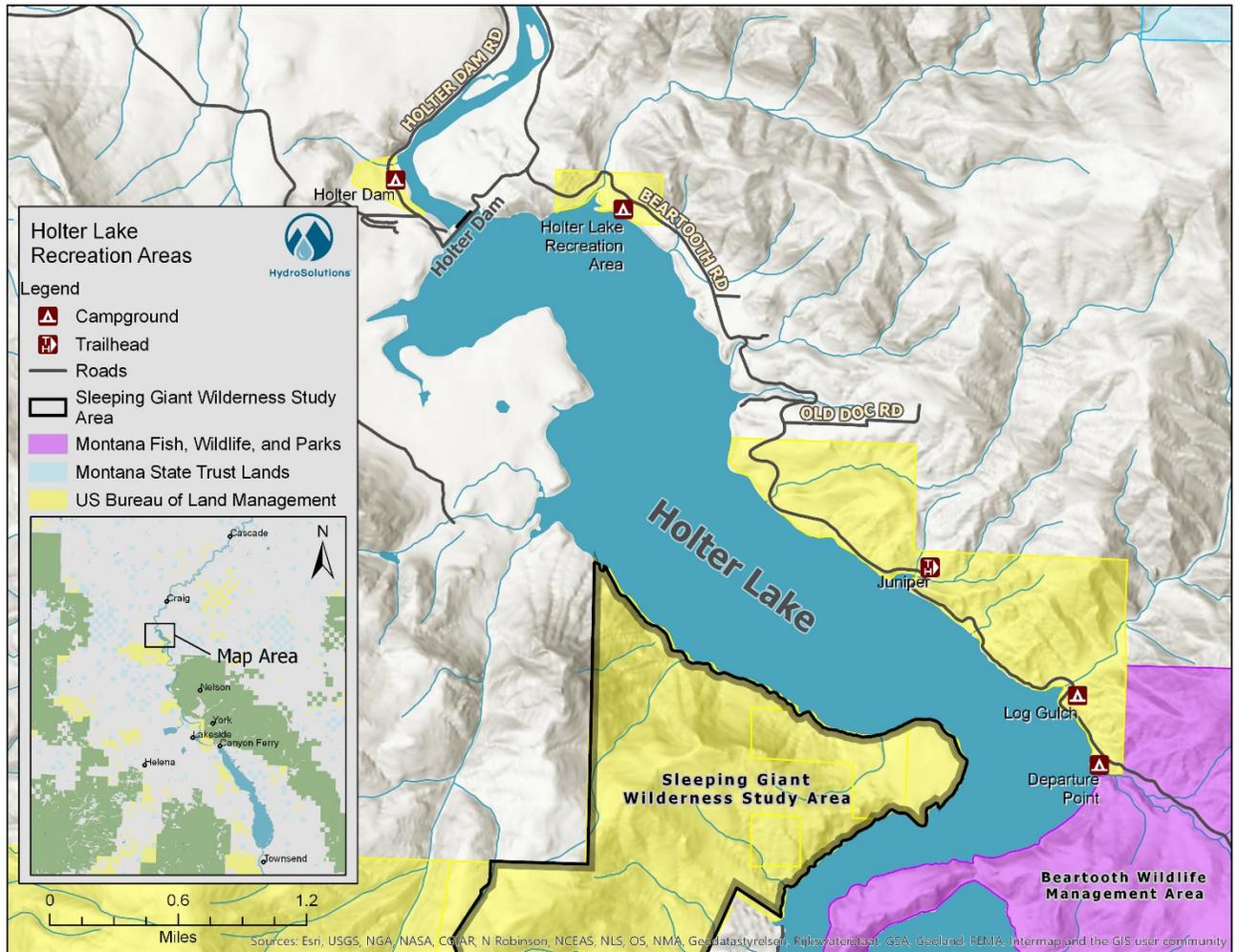


Figure 4-3. Area surrounding Holter Lake showing recreation sites, land management, access routes, and topography.

4.1.5.1 Departure Point

Existing Setting: Located on BLM property in the upper region of Lower Holter Reservoir, adjacent to the Beartooth WMA, this site consists of three (3) picnic areas/shelters, four (4) camping sites that can accommodate trailers up to 50 feet, and vault toilets. A water hydrant is provided, but the water is not potable. Campsites are primitive and no hook-ups are available. The site beach area accommodates shoreline fishing and swimming at user discretion. The site does not currently meet ADA accessibility criteria.

Key Considerations to maintaining Levels of Acceptable Change at the Departure Point:

Maintaining good asphalt access road and parking areas. Managing soil erosion along the shoreline as it is reaching unacceptable levels.

4.1.5.2 Log Gulch Campground

Existing Setting: The Log Gulch Campground provides visitors with 70 campsites; 60 of these campsites accommodate both RV and tent. The remaining 10 sites (campsites 61-70) are tent only and do not allow generator use. Campsites are primitive, without hookups, but each campsite does have a fire pit and picnic table. Potable water is accessible at various locations throughout the area. This site has a dock with a boat ramp on both side and a fish cleaning station. Two docks with boat slips are also available on a first-come, first-served basis. Vault toilets are available throughout the site. Two ramada shelters are also available for public use. The upper ramada can be reserved for group use, but it is otherwise available if group reservations are not in effect. The lower ramada is available on a first-come, first-served basis. There is also a designated swimming area with a beach that contains a shade shelter.

Key Considerations to maintaining Levels of Acceptable Change at Log Gulch

Campground: Maintaining the condition of the asphalt access road and parking areas and managing soil erosion along the shoreline to assure that it does not reach unacceptable levels are priorities at Log Gulch. The parking area is often at capacity on summer weekends and crowding creates user conflicts. BLM staff and volunteers are relied on heavily to keep the site running. Campers may arrive to find no available sites. The access road is windy and has little shoulder. A reservation system for camping may alleviate some of the crowding and road congestion by redirecting visitors when camping facilities are not available. Alternatively, visitors could utilize another recreation site.

4.1.5.3 Holter Lake Campground

Existing Setting: This BLM site offers 50 campsites based on first-come, first-serve. Reservations are not available at Holter Lake Campground, but a pilot program using the recreation.gov website may be operational during a portion of the summer of 2019 for approximately 30 of the 50 sites.

Each campsite has a fire-pit and picnic table and most have grassy areas and trees. No hookups are available on-site. Potable water is available on-site. There is also an office building and a restroom with running water near the boat docks. There is a ramada available with no reservations via a first-come, first-serve policy. This site also has an extensive dock system and ample boat and trailer parking near the ramps. Additional boat and trailer parking is available in an overflow lot. The loading dock is available with 3 launch retrieval lands and ramps on each side. There are two docks with multiple boat slips each. All boat slips are available on a first-come, first-serve basis for paid campers. Slips are not rentable. Site managers and campground hosts are available. A per-vehicle day-use fee applies at this site, and users can purchase a season pass for a vehicle if desired.

Key Considerations to maintaining Levels of Acceptable Change at Holter Lake

Campground: Maintaining good asphalt access road and parking areas and managing soil erosion along the shoreline to assure that it does not reach unacceptable levels are priorities at Holter Lake Campground. This area has the largest visitor use in the planning area. However, based on the results of the 2014 Visitor Surveys, the perceptions of crowding are within acceptable limits. Reaching capacity can be a problem during very busy times, such as summer weekends. When Holter Lake and Log Gulch campgrounds are full, recreationists sometimes attempt to access the Beartooth WMA to find a place to camp (**Figure 4-3**). Other nearby sites such as Holter Dam Campground are options for overflow users. Adequate parking for those that come to launch their boat to access dispersed sites can also be a problem during the busy months. A reservation system for camping may alleviate this concern by redirecting visitors when camping facilities fill to capacity.

4.1.6 Dispersed Camping and On-River Experience

Existing Setting: There are numerous dispersed, user-created camp sites within the Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area and Holter Lake planning area, many with established fire rings and identifiable tent sites. Dispersed camping is the term used for camping anywhere on public land outside of a designated campground. The ROS for this section of the corridor is Semi-Primitive, Motorized. The dispersed camp sites are only accessible by boat or hiking trails and experience high use in the popular summer months. Although there are no services, the Forest Service has been managing the more popular dispersed camp sites, including removing trash, decommissioning fire rings, and weed/vegetation management.

Desired Conditions: Dispersed camping provides a sense of solitude and primitiveness, which many people prefer over a developed campground.

Key Considerations to maintaining the desired conditions at the dispersed camping areas:

1. Continued management of existing dispersed camping areas, including routine clean-up, fire ring decommissioning, weed management, and erosion control.
2. Limit additional dispersed camping areas from being established in sensitive resource areas.
3. Protect and maintain cultural and ecological resources.

5 Management Issues and Direction

Recreational use within Holter Lake and the Gates of the Mountains River Corridor is increasing in popularity. As the resource managers plan for the future, they must have clear direction for managing public expectations and protecting the natural environment. As user demand increases, the potential to change the quality of the various types of recreational experiences also increases. To ensure that management works toward the vision statement developed as part of the planning process, the management issues are organized by the five guiding principle areas identified by the stakeholder group.

1. Recreational Opportunity
2. Conservation of Ecology
3. Cultural and Historical Integrity
4. Economic Opportunity
5. Public Safety

5.1 Recreational Opportunity

Maintaining or enhancing the recreational opportunities at Holter Lake and in the Gates of the Mountains may require users to adapt to increases in use at some areas. Although some of the following do not represent a need for change in management direction, these issues may become more of a focus as use increases.

5.1.1 Issue: Poor Site Facility Conditions

The planning area facilities are monitored on a regular basis and results are reflected in the 2018 Managers' Survey (Pinnacle Research 2019). Acceptable conditions of these facilities are within the Fair, Good or Very Good condition. However, there are a variety of facilities within the planning area that have received lower conditions by site managers, including the Condition of Interpretive Signs at Beaver Creek Access Site (Poor), Conditions of the Vault Toilet at Meriwether Picnic Area (Poor), and Conditions of Bulletin Boards/ Kiosks/ Regulatory Signs at Beaver Creek Access Site (Poor) and Coulter Campground (Poor). Therefore, there is a need for possible management actions at these facilities.

In addition to those stated above, the boat dock at Beartooth Landing is considered in good condition. However, annual installation of the boat dock is challenging and alternative lighter materials may be available.

Possible Management Actions: Increased enforcement to minimize vandalism, replacement, repair or removal of structures that are a public safety concern. Seek funds to improve and replace existing infrastructure. Site-specific changes are detailed in Appendix A.

5.1.2 Issue: Visitor Crowding

Based on data from the 2018 Visitor Use Counts (Research 2019) and Managers Survey results (Pinnacle Research 2019), visitor use at certain facilities have reached or regularly exceed 100% capacity utilization in the summer peak times. These include weekend use at the Departure Point Day Use Area, Holter Lake Campground, Holter Lake Day Use Area and Boat Ramp Parking, and Log Gulch Day Use Area. Other facilities are reaching capacity (over 90%), including Departure Point Campground (95% on weekends), Holter Lake Campground (90% on weekdays), and Log Gulch Campground and Boat Ramp Parking (90% on weekends).

Within the planning area, thresholds are established in the Missouri-Madison Comprehensive Recreation Plan (NorthWestern Energy 2016). Results from the 2014 Visitor Survey Data (Pinnacle Research 2015) indicated that visitors rate the Holter Lake area (including Departure Point, Log Gulch, Holter Lake Campground, and Holter Dam Campground, on the Missouri River just below Holter Dam) at 3.5 (slightly crowded) on a scale of 1 (not at all crowded) to 9 (extremely crowded). The Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area rating was 2.4. These ratings are both within the acceptable limits set forth in the Missouri-Madison Comprehensive Recreation Plan of less than 6 and less than 3, respectively.

Possible Management Actions: Establishment of camping reservation system, enforcements of capacity at parking areas via ticketing or lot full signs, limiting number of people per campsite, fee systems, additional site development.

5.2 Conservation of Ecology

As noted previously, the fish and wildlife resources within Holter Lake and the Gates of the Mountains are managed by the FWP. The Forest Service manages the habitat conditions for the lands it manages, while BLM and FWP manage the lands under their respective jurisdictions.

5.2.1 Issue: Soil Erosion and Compaction

Based on results of the Annual Managers' Survey (Pinnacle Research 2019), the current conditions of soil erosion along the shorelines range between a moderate to high degree, including the Beaver Creek Access Site (High), Departure Point (Moderate), Beartooth Landing (Moderate), Holter Lake Campground (Moderate) and Log Gulch Campground (Moderate). With an acceptable condition being no erosion or a low degree of erosion, there is a need for management action at a variety of the sites in the planning area. Determination of the cause of soil erosion is an important factor for determining appropriate solutions, however.

Based on results of the Annual Managers' Survey (Pinnacle Research 2019), the current conditions of soil compaction and disturbance at sites in Undeveloped ROS classes range between a moderate to high degree, including the Meriwether Picnic Area (High), Beartooth Landing (Moderate) and Coulter Campground (Moderate). With an acceptable condition being no compaction or a low to moderate degree of compaction, there is a need for management action at the Meriwether Picnic Area.

Possible Management Actions: Erosion protection, public education and rotate areas out of use on a regular basis. Address Meriwether site restoration needs.

5.2.2 Issue: Vegetation Loss, Noxious Weeds & Invasive Species

The Forest Service and the BLM both monitor and manage invasive plants on the lands that they manage. FWP monitors boats for invasive aquatic plants and invertebrates through their boat check station and inspection before launch programs.

Based on results of the 2018 Annual Managers' Survey (Pinnacle Research 2019), the current conditions of vegetative damage at sites in Undeveloped ROS classes (Meriwether Picnic Area and Beartooth Landing) is at a moderate degree. With an acceptable condition being no vegetative damage or low degree of vegetative damage at these sites, there is a need for management action at the Meriwether Picnic Area and Beartooth Landing.

Possible Management Actions: Increased public education, rotate areas out of use on a regular basis for vegetation management. Per the 2018 Forest Plan management actions intended to prevent and respond to invasive plants will be dynamic and designed in a manner that allows for an adaptive management approach (USDA Forest Service 2018). A site-specific weed management plan could be developed and implemented as part of the Meriwether Guard duties.

5.2.3 Issue: Sanitation and Human Waste

As the use of the area continues to increase, there is an increase in litter, as well as increased maintenance required for toilets amongst the various facilities at Holter Lake and along the Gates of the Mountains. The vault toilets at Beaver Creek, Departure Point, Log Gulch, and Holter Lake can be serviced by a pumper truck. Because the barge must be used to access and pump the toilets that are not readily accessible along the river between Coulter and Beartooth Landing, the annualized cost of pumping is a large part of the overall budget. The toilets at Coulter and Meriwether are pumped one time every other summer season (biannually) on average, and require loading a pumper truck onto the barge and piloting the barge on the river to reach each site. The Beartooth Landing toilet needs pumping less often than the other two barge-accessed sites. When needed, the BLM coordinates with the Forest Service to include the Beartooth site on the barge's schedule. Mobilizing the barge to conduct pumping costs on the order of \$4,000 to \$5,000 per trip. The barge itself also requires regular inspections, maintenance, and repair to keep it functioning.

Beaver Creek Access Site, Colter Campground, Meriwether Picnic Area and Beartooth Landing are visited on a weekly basis for a general inspection and site clean-up. These sites are managed as "pack-it-in-pack-it-out", but the Meriwether Guard does collect garbage left behind by users during their daily site visits. The BLM sites within the Holter Lake recreation area are staffed and have garbage facilities.

Based on results of the 2018 Annual Managers' Survey (Pinnacle Research 2019), the current degree of sanitation problems at sites in Undeveloped ROS classes (Beartooth Landing) is at a moderate degree. In addition, based on the 2014 Visitor Survey Results (Pinnacle Research 2015), visitors were dissatisfied with the sanitation at Beartooth Landing. There are no acceptable conditions defined in the Missouri-Madison Comprehensive Recreation Plan (NorthWestern Energy 2016), as the data is for informational purposes only, for the degree of sanitation or visitor satisfaction with sanitation, this information is collected and notes areas with moderate to high degrees or sanitation problems or dissatisfaction. Based on these results, it appears there is a need for management action at the Beartooth Landing to reduce sanitation problems and to potentially streamline management of this site.

Possible Management Actions: Public education (Leave-no-trace program) at all sites on river, and increased maintenance at Beartooth Landing. Modernizing the waste management system may be an option for some sites that receive lower use such as Beartooth Landing. Currently Beartooth Landing is managed as a BLM recreation site. However, the BLM does not patrol or provide for regular maintenance at the site because they do not have boating equipment to access the site regularly. It may be feasible to transfer maintenance responsibility to the Forest Service to alleviate issues with trash and human waste at this site through development of a formal inter-agency agreement.

5.2.4 Issue: Fish Quality

FWP conducts fish sampling in the two reservoirs and along the river sections. These data can provide information on the species composition in the lake and condition of game fish. Representative data from two years of fall and spring sampling for game fish and non-game fish collected in Holter Lake in 2017 and 2018 are provided to illustrate the species composition in recent years (**Figures 5-1 and 5-2**). Rainbow trout are the most common game fish collected and white sucker and yellow perch dominate the non-game fish collected. Other sources of data on fish and habitat conditions may come from outfitters reporting concerns or changes they observe to FWP.

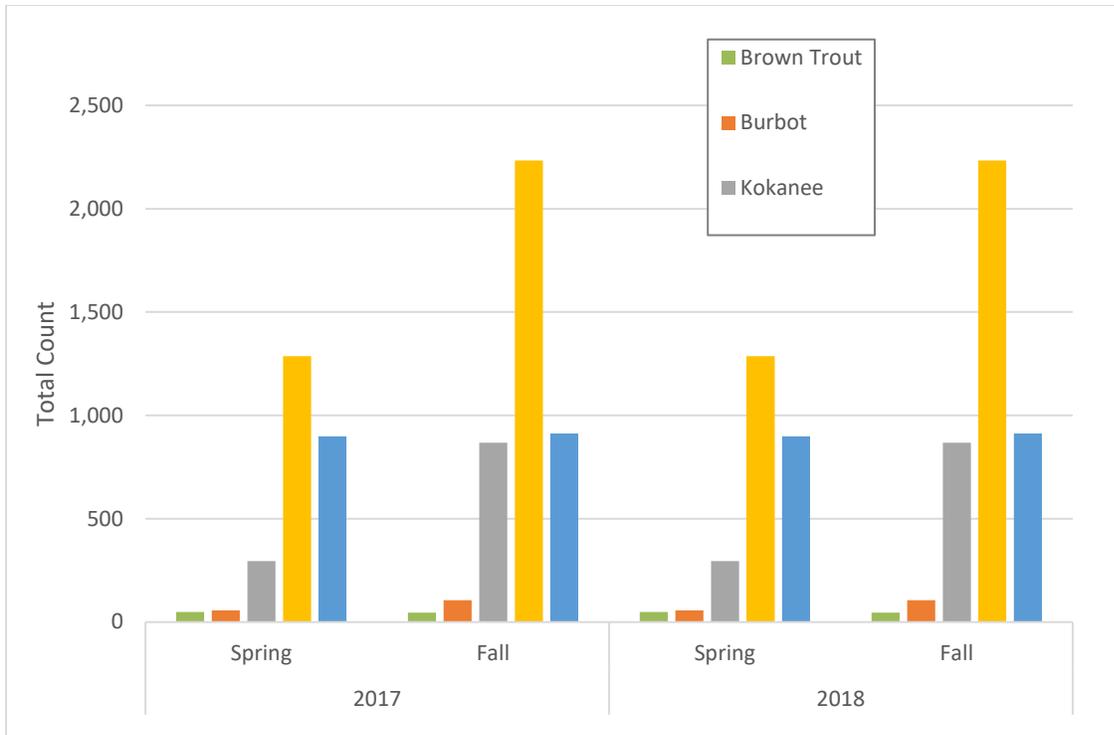


Figure 5-1. Dominant game fish species collected in representative fall and spring horizontal net sets in 2017 and 2018.

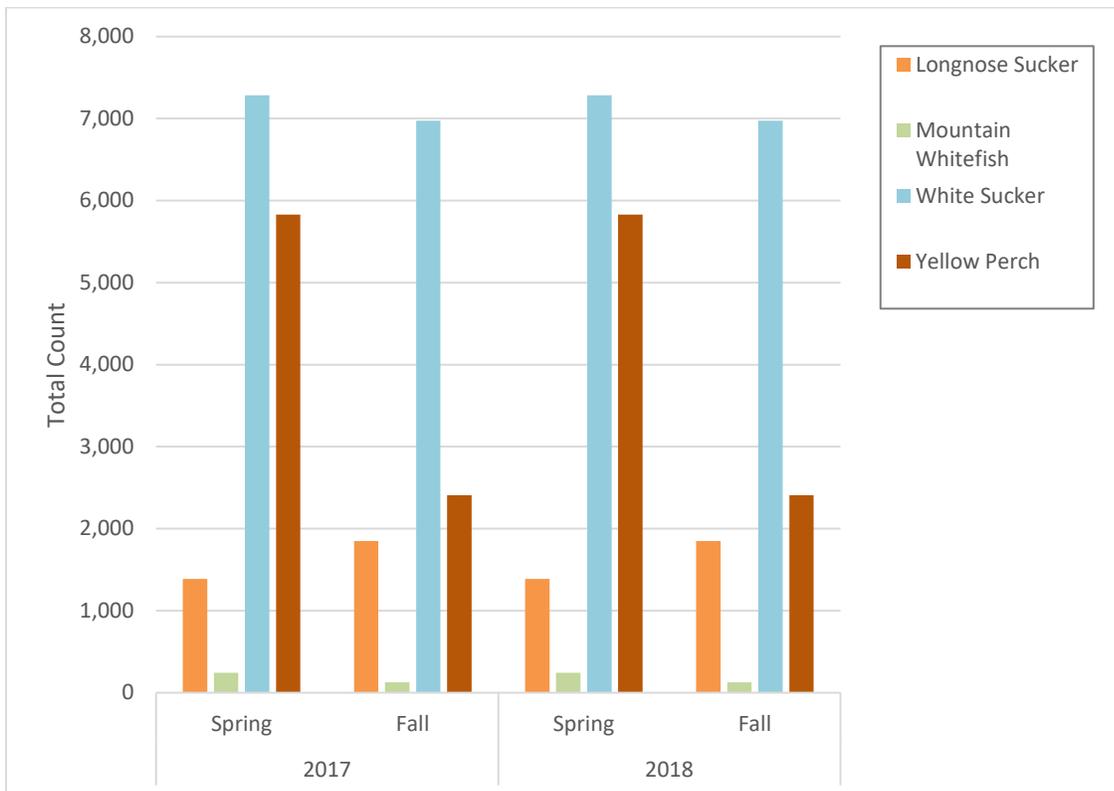


Figure 5-2. Dominant non-game fish species collected in representative fall and spring horizontal net sets in 2017 and 2018.

FWP stocks rainbow trout into Holter Lake each year, and stocking rates since 2000 have averaged just under 300,000 fish (MFWP 2019). Most stocked fish are in the catchable range of 6 to 8 inches, but smaller fingerlings are also stocked in some years. In 2017 the stocking rates were to be reduced from 125,000 catchable rainbow trout to 29,000 in 2018 and 40,000 planned for 2019 due to budget cuts (MFWP 2017) (**Figure 5-3**). Data on angling pressure is collected by FWP via a mail-in creel census, but these data are not available after 2015. In 2015 the angling pressure for Holter Lake was reported as 90,470 (+/- 6,409) total including 85,838 resident anglers (+/- 6,333) (MFWP 2016).

Possible Management Actions:

Fish quality is assessed and managed by FWP. The Forest Service and FWP often coordinate and collaborate on fisheries habitat projects, but the Forest Service does not manage the fishery directly. Possible future actions would include coordinating on the Beaver Creek river restoration project and continuing to collaborate on fisheries and habitat monitoring and management projects. Signage and education on best practices for catch and release fishing could be part of the general information and educational materials at access points.

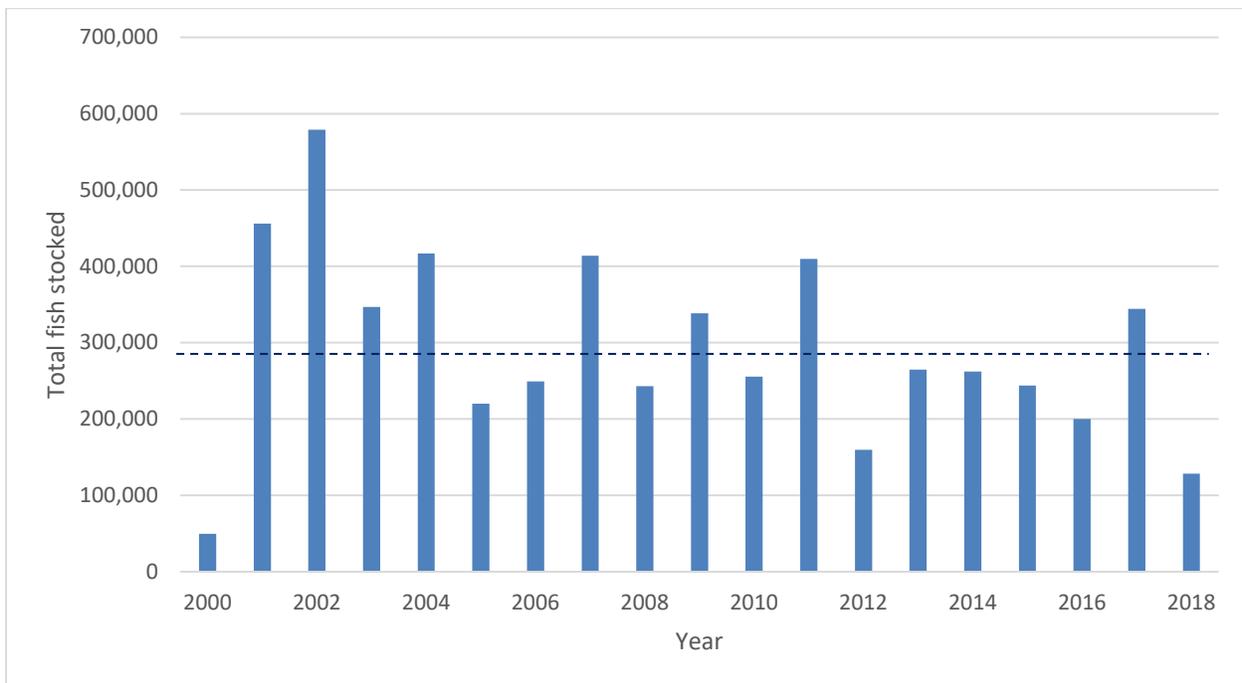


Figure 5-3. Total number of rainbow trout stocked into Holter Lake by FWP from 2000 to 2018. Dashed line represents the average across the years graphed.

5.3 Cultural and Historical Integrity

The Forest Service maintains several interpretive displays along the river corridor and has routed trails and access points to allow users to see and learn about the history and pre-history of the area. Additional interpretive materials may be considered as part of the site-specific

planning and design process. The issue of site facility conditions, which includes vandalism (Section 5.1.1) is relevant to preserving the historical and cultural integrity of the area.

The Meriwether Picnic Area is an access point to the Mann Gulch Wildfire Historic District, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1999, under Criterion A, which includes sites that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. The Mann Gulch Wildfire Historic District includes both contributing and non-contributing features, including the Mann Gulch, the Rescue Gulch, Mouth of Meriwether Canyon, and Forest Trail #258. The Mann Gulch Historic Preservation Plan provides direction for protection and management of these features (USDA Forest Service 2014).

5.4 Economic Opportunity

The land management agencies understand that Holter Lake and the Gates of the Mountains River Corridor attract recreationalists who contribute to the local economy by purchasing goods and services. The condition of the area and the uniqueness and variety of recreational opportunities contribute to the value of the area to the local economy. There are no issues regarding economic opportunities that would necessitate immediate management actions. However, maintaining or improving the conditions of recreation facilities and access points within the planning area will contribute to increased economic opportunities by sustaining the area's popularity and continuing to attract users from the local area and beyond.

5.5 Issue: Public Safety

The demand and need for public safety related to recreation use is affected by the ability of local law enforcement and responsible agencies. Additionally, the complexity of agency jurisdiction creates confusion for agencies and recreationists. Public education and outreach are key methods for proactively preventing accidents and increasing public safety.

5.5.1 Issue: Road Maintenance

Use of the existing roads to access recreation facilities is increasing and causing increased deterioration. There are agency jurisdictions that create confusion as to where the responsibilities lie for repairs and maintenance. In addition, the road upkeep is expensive. Within the Gates of the Mountains, there are no roads that access these facilities, which include Beartooth Landing Campground, Meriwether Picnic Area and Coulter Campground. However, the other planning area facilities (Log Gulch Campground, Departure Point, Holter Lake Campground, and Beaver Creek Access Site) do have access roads. Based on the results of the Managers' Survey (Pinnacle Research 2019), there are a variety of gravel and paved roads within the planning area in need of attention. These include the paved road leading into and within Holter Lake Campground, as well as the paved parking area (Fair Condition), the paved road within Log Gulch Campground, as well as the paved parking area (Fair Condition), the gravel road leading into Beaver Creek Access Site (Poor), and the gravel road within the Beaver

Creek Access Site, as well as the gravel parking area (Fair). Although there are no thresholds for change tied to the Manager's Survey results, there are possible management options that could take place to improve these facilities. However, due to the high cost of road maintenance, prioritizing these actions amidst site improvements and ongoing operations and maintenance may be difficult.

Possible Management Actions: Coordinate efforts to improve road conditions within and adjacent to recreation sites.

5.5.2 Issue: Boat Safety/Etiquette

As the area continues to become more popular, access sites and boat launches are receiving more traffic and congestion. The higher number of craft on the water may be more noticeable along popular areas of the river. Overcrowding can lead to tension and unsafe conditions. FWP regulations establish a no-wake area in and around the BLM boat landings as buoyed, Juniper Bay, Log Gulch, Departure Point, and Meriwether Picnic Area (MFWP 2018).

In addition, no water skiing, tubing, or wake surfing is permitted on Saturday, Sunday or legal holidays from the mouth of the canyon on upper Holter Lake to Gates of the Mountains outlet near Mann Gulch, as marked (MFWP 2018).

User Conflicts is an issue area that is measured in the Visitor Surveys. The last visitor survey, completed in 2014, resulted in a positive opinion of the behaviors of other people. This will continue to be measured and possible management actions will take place if this begins to deteriorate.

Possible Management Actions: Working with recreating public and managers to resolve conflicts between different types of users. Boating safety information and signs at boat access ramps may be helpful to users.

5.5.3 Issue: Parking Shortages

Within the BLM sites, there are parking shortages during the peak season. These shortages create unsafe conditions on roadways and potential for user conflicts. It may not be possible to expand the parking capacity because of site constraints, but this issue will be reviewed as part of site-specific planning. Specifically, per the Managers' Survey (Pinnacle Research 2019), certain facilities are experiencing parking shortages at boat ramps, including Holter Lake Campground (100% capacity utilized on weekends, 80% capacity utilized on weekdays) and Log Gulch Campground (90% capacity utilized on weekends, 70% capacity utilized on weekdays).

The Beaver Creek Access Site can become overcrowded during the peak season as well, as evidenced by the condition of the toilet facilities and increased need for pumping, vegetation damage adjacent to current parking areas from overflow use, and anecdotal accounts from users.

Possible Management Actions:

Development BLM Sites: Establish a camping reservation system, enforce capacity at parking areas via ticketing or “lot full” signs, limit the number of people per campsite, develop a fee systems, or develop additional sites.

Beaver Creek Access Site: Redesign and additional site engineering to make better use of the area available, including identifying separate boat trailer and vehicle parking areas would improve site utility and possibly reduce off-site impacts. Specific site details are provided in Appendix A.

5.6 Management Prescriptions

The sites within the Gates of the Mountains Recreation Area are in overall good condition, but the user data suggest that use is likely to increase in the near future. The Forest Service has developed a list of priority actions for each site within their jurisdiction. The BLM-managed sites are subject to the Resource Management Plan (BLM 2008). In order to maintain or enhance recreational opportunities in the Holter Lake-Gates of the Mountain area, a field inspection of each site was conducted in 2018 and a list of actions was developed for each site. Appendix A describes the management context and lists each site’s potential improvements. Conceptual site designs are provided for each site to assist the reader in visualizing the current and proposed facilities and their arrangement.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Proposed Site Improvements and Priorities

This plan has been prepared consistent with direction from other management guidelines, including:

- Helena-Lewis and Clark Forest Forest Plan (2018),
- BLM Butte Field Office Resource Management Plan (2008)
- Missouri-Madison Comprehensive Recreation Management Plan (NorthWestern Energy 2016), and
- Upper Missouri River Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan (2019-2028)

The following is a list of management actions that could be used to address recreation management concerns and issues:

1. Meriwether Picnic Area improvements, including pavilion excavation and material redistribution, erosion control and natural drainage restoration, vegetation management, restoration of potable water system, modernization of waste system and trail maintenance
2. Beaver Creek Access Site – erosion control and parking improvements, expand capacity, add accessible parking pad, additional accessibility vault toilet, and accessible fishing pier, replace foot bridge
3. Coulter Campground improvements- to include additional site development and a group site with maps and numbering to aid visitors.
4. Develop interagency agreement between BLM and Forest Service and increase maintenance schedule at Beartooth Landing
5. Reservation System at BLM campgrounds to alleviate crowding
6. Planning area wide vegetation management and erosion control, including selective temporary closure for rehabilitation efforts.
7. Enhance information and education messages
8. Increase management presence at BLM sites during peak times

Table A-1 summarizes the specific site improvements for Meriwether, Coulter, Beaver Creek and Beartooth Landing sites and notes how each improvement aligns with the management issues and goals identified at the stakeholder meeting. Conceptual site plans are provided in a separate attachment for each site.

Meriwether Picnic Area:

1. Current Management:
 - Forest Service
 - Daily and weekly maintenance by Meriwether Guard
 - Bi-annual major maintenance- vault toilet pumping
2. Current ROS: Semi-primitive, motorized river
3. Proposed improvements within site:
 - Replace outhouse
 - Restore pavilion - balance fill on-site
 - Evaluate and restore natural drainage
 - Restore water system – to cabin, pavilion, outhouse, and dock
 - New outhouse location
 - New technology for waste management (alternative toilet type)
 - Restore handicap access
 - New interpretive area on Meriwether Fire and flood impacts
 - Add two campsites
4. Conceptual Site Plan: Separate Attachment

Beaver Creek Access Site:

1. Current Management:
 - Forest Service,
 - Weekly maintenance during high use seasons (spring and fall)
 - Weekly- vault toilet pumping
2. Current ROS: Semi-primitive, motorized river
3. Describe improvements and place within site:
 - Parking area improvements
 - ADA vault toilet
 - ADA trail and fishing pier
 - River Kiosk and sign improvements
 - Provide river access points and stabilize areas on bank that were used as informal access points.
 - Roadway improvements
4. Conceptual Site Plan: Separate Attachment

Coulter Campground:

1. Current Management:
 - Forest Service
 - Daily and weekly maintenance by Meriwether Guard
 - Bi-annual major maintenance- vault toilet pumping
2. Current ROS: Semi-primitive, motorized river
3. Proposed improvements within site:
 - Addition of a group site

-
- Develop additional campsites/replace those that were removed from threat of flooding.
 - Signage for invasive species
 - Improve Kiosk
 - Reservation System
 - Tent pads
 - Add campsite numbers
4. Conceptual Site Plan: Separate Attachment

Beartooth Landing:

1. Current Management:
 - BLM with informal Forest Service support
 - Daily and weekly maintenance by Meriwether Guard
 - Bi-annual major maintenance- vault toilet pumping
2. Current ROS: Semi-primitive, motorized river
3. Proposed improvements within site:
 - Add campsite numbers
 - Improve signage and include site map
 - Weed management plan/erosion control
 - Interagency Agreement in place with BLM and USFS
4. Conceptual Site Plan: Separate Attachment

Additional Management Actions:

1. Increase use of Reservation System at Holter Lake recreation area BLM campgrounds to alleviate crowding
2. Planning area wide vegetation management and erosion control, including temporary closure for rehabilitation efforts
3. Enhance information and education messages
4. Increase management and volunteer presence at Holter Lake recreation area BLM sites during peak times

Table A-1. Summary of proposed site improvements and alignment with management issues identified in stakeholder meetings. Sites managed by the Forest Service are designated in green, and sites managed by BLM are designated in orange.

Facility and Proposed Improvements	Facility Conditions	Crowding/ Congestion	Soil Erosion	Vegetation Loss/ Noxious Weeds	Sanitation	Cultural and Historical Integrity	Public Safety-General	Public Safety-Road Maintenance	Public Safety-Boat Safety	Public Safety-Parking Shortages
Meriwether Picnic Area										
Restore pavilion - balance fill on-site	*		*			*	*			
Replace outhouse	*				*					
Evaluate and restore natural drainage			*	*		*	*			
Restore water system – to cabin, pavilion, outhouse, and dock	*				*		*			
New outhouse location	*	*			*					
New technology for waste management (alternative toilet type)					*					
Restore handicap access	*						*			
New interpretive area on Meriwether Fire and flood impacts						*				
Add two campsites		*	*							
Coulter Campground										
Addition of a group site		*								
Develop additional campsites/replace those that	*	*								

Table A-1. Summary of proposed site improvements and alignment with management issues identified in stakeholder meetings. Sites managed by the Forest Service are designated in green, and sites managed by BLM are designated in orange.

Facility and Proposed Improvements	Facility Conditions	Crowding/ Congestion	Soil Erosion	Vegetation Loss/ Noxious Weeds	Sanitation	Cultural and Historical Integrity	Public Safety-General	Public Safety-Road Maintenance	Public Safety-Boat Safety	Public Safety-Parking Shortages
were removed from threat of flooding.										
Signage for invasive species			*	*		*				
Improve kiosk	*						*			
Campsite reservation system		*								
Tent pads	*		*	*						
Add campsite numbers	*	*								
Beartooth Landing										
Add campsite numbers	*	*	*							
Improve signage and include site map	*			*						
Weed management plan/erosion control			*	*						
Interagency Agreement in place with BLM and USFS	*				*					
Beaver Creek Access										
Parking area improvements	*	*								*
ADA vault toilet	*				*					
ADA trail and fishing pier	*		*	*			*			

Table A-1. Summary of proposed site improvements and alignment with management issues identified in stakeholder meetings. Sites managed by the Forest Service are designated in green, and sites managed by BLM are designated in orange.

Facility and Proposed Improvements	Facility Conditions	Crowding/ Congestion	Soil Erosion	Vegetation Loss/ Noxious Weeds	Sanitation	Cultural and Historical Integrity	Public Safety- General	Public Safety- Road Maintenance	Public Safety- Boat Safety	Public Safety- Parking Shortages
River Kiosk and sign improvements	*			*					*	
Provide river access points and stabilize areas on bank that were used as informal access points.	*		*	*			*			
Roadway Improvements			*				*	*		

APPENDIX B: 2018 FOREST PLAN EXCERPT: MISSOURI RIVER CORRIDOR

Plan Components – Missouri River Corridor (MISCOR)

The Missouri River is a nationally recognized river famous for its fishing, outstanding scenery, and the history present throughout it. The area is a primary access route through the Gates of the Mountains, a distinctive limestone cliff formation along this portion of the Missouri River.

The Missouri River Corridor has much historic and cultural significance. The term “Gates of the Mountains” was first used by Captain Meriwether Lewis in 1805 to describe these scenic and unique cliffs. Captains Lewis and Clark passed through the corridor on route to the Pacific Ocean and back in 1805-06. The Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail, a nationally designated trail, is located in the bottom of the corridor. Additionally, the historic Mann Gulch Fire Historic Landscape is located within the Missouri River Corridor area. This historic landscape is recognized on the National Register of Historic Places and memorializes the loss of smokejumper fire fighters during the 1949 Mann Gulch fire.

Recreation use of the Missouri River Corridor is year-round but particularly high during the summer months when water recreation is the most active throughout the corridor. A commercial tour boat operation offers boat trips up the river and there are a number of developed and dispersed recreation sites along the banks of the river. This area also provides access to the western portions of the Gates of the Mountain Wilderness. In addition, there are concentrations of cliff nesting raptors in this corridor (also see FW-WLO-DC-03).

Desired Conditions (BB-MISCOR-DC)

01. The developed recreation settings and opportunities along the Missouri River corridor are ecological sustainability and recreational user conflicts are minimized.
02. The setting and recreation opportunities along the Missouri River Corridor maintain the natural scenic beauty of the river while seeking ways to enhance, protect, and improve the largely natural appearing scenic quality of the canyon’s visual corridor.
03. The historic and cultural features of the Missouri River corridor are protected and enhanced. Where appropriate, interpretation is provided for forest visitors to enhance their experience(s) of the area.
04. Travelers within the Missouri River Corridor have opportunities to learn about the 1806 Lewis and Clark Expedition, the Mann Gulch Fire, and to experience and appreciate the unique natural environment of the area. Trailside interpretation and related visitor information services enhance visitor appreciation of the outdoors, the natural resources, scenery, and cultural and historic values within the corridor.

05. Existing or future developed recreation sites accommodate increased recreational use in the corridor while protecting the unique and important natural resources and historic and cultural features within the area.

06. Dispersed recreation opportunities along the river corridor allow for exploration and discovery with minimal environmental impacts and user conflicts.

Goals (BB-MISCOR-GO)

01. The operation, maintenance, and delivery of recreation along the Missouri River corridor is supported by strong partnerships and volunteer programs.

Guidelines (BB-MISCOR-GDL)

01. To protect and enhance the scenic quality of the area, management activities in the Missouri River Corridor should be consistent with the scenic integrity objective of high to very high.

Suitability (BB-MISCOR-SUIT)

01. The Missouri River Corridor is unsuitable for timber production. However, harvest may be used for the purposes of providing for public safety and enhancing the recreational or aesthetic values of the corridor.

Plan Components – Benefits to People (SU)

Goal (BB-SU-GO)

01. Work with permit holder to relocate the utility corridor outside of the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness.

Standards (BB-SU-STD)

01. Maintenance of the utility corridor in the Gates of the Mountains Wilderness shall be managed to have minimal effects on wilderness character.