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Bureau of Land Management

BLM Malta Field Office Developed Recreation Fees Business Plan



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North Central Montana District (NCMD)
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BLM Malta Field Office Campgrounds and Day Use Fees Business Plan

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This business plan was prepared by the Bureau of Land Management's Malta Field Office pursuant to the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act of 2004 (16 U.S.C. 6801-6814) and BLM recreation fee program policies. It establishes future management goals and priorities for the following campgrounds Camp Creek, Horse Corral, Montana Gulch, Zortman Historic Cabin, and Buff's Day Use within the Malta Field Office.

Table of Contents

Field Manager Letter.....	2
1 Executive Summary.....	5
2 Background and Authorities.....	6
3 Introduction to the MAFO Developed Recreation Fee Program	8
3.1 Administrative Unit	9
3.2 Malta Field Office Recreation Programs	
3.2.1 Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs)	9
3.2.2 Extensive Recreation Management Areas (ERMAs)	9
4 Little Rockies Developed Recreation Fee Sites	9
4.1 Camp Creek, Horse Corral, and Montana Gulch Campground Customers	10
4.2 Buffington Day Use Area.....	13
4.3 Historic Zortman Ranger Station	15
4.4 Seasons of Use.....	15
4.5 Infrastructure and Improvements.....	16
4.6 Other MAFO Developed Recreation Sites	17
4.7 Special Designation Areas.....	17
5 Summary of Use and Collected Fees for Existing Fee Sites Error! Bookmark not defined.	7
5.1 Fee Implementation	19
6 Proposed Modification to MAFO Recreation Fee Rates	19
6.1 Analysis of Recreation Fee Rates.....	19
6.2 Impacts from Charging and Not-Charging Recreation Fee Rates.....	22
6.3 Impacts from Modifying Fees to Recreation Users.....	22
6.4 Impacts from Not Modifying Fees to Recreation Users	22
7 Justification for Increasing Fees	23
8 Administration and Labor Costs.....	24
9 Maintenance and Operating Costs.....	25
10 Future Improvements and Planning	25
11 Revenues	25
12 Public Outreach.....	26

Tables

Table 1: Fee areas showing current and proposed fees.....	4
Table 2: RUP fees collected from Camp Creek (2014-2023) with visitor and payment info.....	17
Table 3: RUP fees collected from Montana Gulch (2014-2023) with visitor and payment info.....	18
Table 4: Total Visitor Days by year for the previous 10-year period.....	18
Table 5: RMIS Visitor Days.....	18
Table 6: Comparison between current and proposed fees and amenities.....	20
Table 7: Maintenance Contract Amount vs. RUP fees collected for 2014 vs. 2023.....	23
Table 8: Cost comparison and percentage increase of items in 2017 vs. 2024.....	24
Table 9: Average approximate salary expenses for BLM staff.....	24
Table 10: Estimated annual maintenance and operating costs.....	25
Table 11: Summary of HiLine Revenues for (2019-2023) for RUP and SRP fees.....	26

Figures

Figure 1: Map of North Central Montana District.....	9
Figure 2: Typical campsite at Montana Gulch Campground.....	11
Figure 3: Typical campsite at Camp Creek Campground.....	12
Figure 4: Corrals at Horse Corral camping area of Camp Creek Campground.....	13
Figure 5: Picnic shelters at Buff's Day Use Area.....	14
Figure 6: Concrete Cornhole game at Buff's Day Use Area.....	14
Figure 7: Historic Zortman Ranger Station.....	15

1 Executive Summary

This *BLM Malta Field Office Developed Recreation Fees Business Plan* has been prepared by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Malta Field Office (MAFO) in accordance with the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) of 2004 (P.L. 108-447, as amended) and BLM recreation program policy and manual direction regarding the administration of fee sites (BLM Manual 2930). FLREA provides the BLM current authority to establish, modify, charge, and collect recreation fees at federal recreational lands and waters. FLREA states that an expanded amenity fee may be collected if the developed campground provides at least five of the following nine services: tent or trailer spaces, picnic tables, drinking water, access roads, the collection of the fee by an employee or agent of the Federal land management agency, reasonable visitor protection, refuse containers, toilet facilities, and simple devices for containing a campfire. Per FLREA the Interagency Senior and Access passes may provide a 50% discount on expanded amenity fees associated with individual campsites. This discount does not apply to group sites or dump station fees. FLREA (16 United States Code (U.S.C.) 6802(b)(1)) does not grant the authority for BLM to provide discounts or reduced recreation fees for local residents or other special groups.

This Business Plan outlines the direction for the continued maintenance and operation of the Developed Campgrounds and Day-Use Areas and the associated Recreation Use Permits within the MAFO. BLM is proposing to increase overnight fees at Camp Creek and Montana Gulch Campgrounds to levels consistent with other camping areas in the region and increase fees for Buffington Day Use Area and the Zortman Ranger Station.

The proposed expanded amenity fees MAFO are:

Table 1: Fee areas showing current and proposed fees.

Fee Areas	Current Fees	Proposed Fees (Expanded Amenity)
Camp Creek and Horse Corral Campgrounds	\$10 camping (expanded amenity)	\$20 camping (expanded amenity)
Buff's Day Use Area	\$30/day for 1 picnic shelter \$60/day entire site	\$60/day for 1 picnic shelter \$100/day entire site
Zortman Ranger Station	\$75/day rental	\$100/day rental
Montana Gulch Campground	\$8 camping (expanded amenity)	\$16 camping (expanded amenity)

FLREA guidelines require that each fee program has a business plan that thoroughly discusses fees and explains how the use of these fees is consistent with criteria set forth in FLREA and other BLM directives. Additionally, this Business Plan documents how appropriate fee rates were established, outlines the operational costs for the included recreation sites, and identifies future priorities for the use of collected fees. The Business Plan also notifies the public of the objectives for use of recreation fee revenues and provides the public with an opportunity to comment on the objectives.

The Draft Plan was developed by the MAFO while identifying that additional services may be needed to support a quality recreation experience, or that previous recreation fees were not adequate given use demands and need for services at many of our remote developed recreation sites. Costs for general maintenance and daily operations of these sites is increasing annually. In addition, there has been a sharp increase in recreation use of these sites over the past five years. Increasing operational costs and more visitors has highlighted the need for yearlong maintenance of these sites and increased staff presence at to provide the necessary visitor services.

The data used to analyze and prepare this business plan was obtained through internal BLM tracking and accounting mechanisms such as the Recreation Management Information System (RMIS), Collections and Billing System (CBS), Federal Business Management System (FBMS), and other locally generated recreation and visitor use tracking spreadsheets. For more detailed information, please contact the BLM MAFO point of contact. Some of the additional data may be subject to Privacy Act requirements.

2 Background and Authorities

This business plan has been prepared to meet the criteria defined in the “Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act 2004” (P.L.108-447). The authorities and regulations for this business plan, including recreation fee collections, are:

- **The Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976** (Public Law 94-579; 43 U.S.C. 1701–1787), contains BLM’s general land use management authority over the public lands, and establishes outdoor recreation as one of the principal uses of those lands. Section 302 (b) of FLPMA directs the Secretary of the Interior to regulate through permits or other instruments the use of the public lands. Section 303 of FLPMA contains BLM’s authority to enforce the regulations and impose penalties.
- **The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) of 2004** repealed applicable portions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act and replaced BLM’s authority to collect recreation fees. This current law authorizes BLM to collect recreation fees at sites that meet certain requirements, allows BLM to keep the fee revenues at the local offices where they were collected, and directs how BLM will manage and utilize these revenues. FLREA also established the America the Beautiful – The National Parks and Federal

Recreational Pass Program. FLREA (16 U.S.C. 6802(b)(1)) does not grant the authority for BLM to provide discounts or reduced recreation fees for local residents or other groups.

- **Title 43 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 2930 (43 CFR 2930) Permits for Recreation on Public Lands** contains the regulations governing BLM's recreation permitting program. This business plan has also been prepared pursuant to all applicable BLM recreation fee program policies and guidance, including:
 - BLM Manual 2930, *Recreation Permits and Fees*, Rel. 2-296 dated October 22, 2007
 - BLM Handbook 2930-1, *Recreation Permit and Fee Administration Handbook*, Rel. 2-300 dated November 17, 2014

The BLM strives to manage recreation and visitor services to serve the diverse visitor outdoor recreation demands while helping to maintain sustainable setting conditions needed to conserve the public lands, so the visitors' desired recreation choices remain available. The BLM's goals for delivering recreation benefits from BLM-administered lands and waters to the American people and their communities are to:

- Improve access to appropriate recreation opportunities,
- Ensure a quality experience and enjoyment of natural and cultural resources, and
- Provide for and receive fair value in recreation.
- **BLM Information Bulletin No. 2019-056 – Recreation Fee Revenue Spending Plans and Accomplishment Report**
- **BLM Manual 1105 – Donations, Solicitations, and Fundraising**
- **2015 Approved HiLine District Office Resource Management Plan (RMP)**
 - **Goal** – Provide a diverse array of recreational opportunities and visitor experiences while maintaining healthy BLM land resources.
 - **Objective 1** – Establish, manage, and maintain quality recreation sites and facilities to meet a broad range of public needs subject to resource constraints.
 - **Objective 2** – Manage commercial, competitive, or special events with special recreation permits that eliminate or minimize impacts on resources and conflicts with other users.
 - **Objective 3** – Manage recreation opportunities and visitor experiences to provide a sustained flow of local economic benefits and protect non-market economic values.
 - **Objective 4** – Manage recreation settings and opportunities by their specific recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) class description for desired recreation opportunities, experience levels, facility developments, and other resource uses.

The BLM recognizes that natural resource-based recreation is a significant economic contributor in most communities adjacent to BLM land. Priorities for Recreation and Visitor Services (BLM 2004d) states, "Our multiple-use mission is to serve the diverse outdoor recreation demands of visitors while helping to maintain the sustainable conditions needed to

conserve their lands and their recreation choices.” The three primary goals for the HiLine District based on the national recreation program are:

- Improve access to appropriate recreation opportunities on BLM-managed or partnered lands and waters;
- Ensure a quality experience and enjoyment of natural resources on BLM-managed or partnered lands and waters; and
- Provide for and receive fair value in recreation.
- The MAFO portion of the NCMD will use various e-commerce technologies, as directed in BLM Instruction Memorandum 2022-010, to provide recreation visitors opportunities to find, reserve, and pay for campsites and day use within the field offices. Most of these options are provided through the interagency reservation service Recreation.gov. If the NCMD decides to add additional reservation services or other types of e-commerce options available in the future, an expanded amenity fee for reservation services would be charged in addition to any other standard or expanded amenity fees in accordance with 16 U.S.C. 6802(g)(2)(G).
- Reservation services fees could range from \$0.50 to \$10.00 depending on the type of service provided. The reservation service fee is subject to contracting requirements and will be adjusted with contract changes or with future updates to the business plan. For visitors who wish not to pay the expanded amenity fee of reservation services the field office will attempt to continue to provide a blend of reservation and first-come first served options at each of the campgrounds and day use areas. Other payment options may also be considered in the future as technology and software develops including onsite credit card payment systems or scan and pay as examples.

3 Introduction to the Malta Field Office Developed Recreation Fee Program

3.1 Administrative Unit

The BLM MAFO is one of three Field Offices within the HiLine portion of the North Central Montana District. The MAFO manages approximately 1.1 million acres, Havre Field Office (HFO) manages 395,000 acres across six Montana Counties, and Glasgow Field Office (GFO) manages just over a million acres.

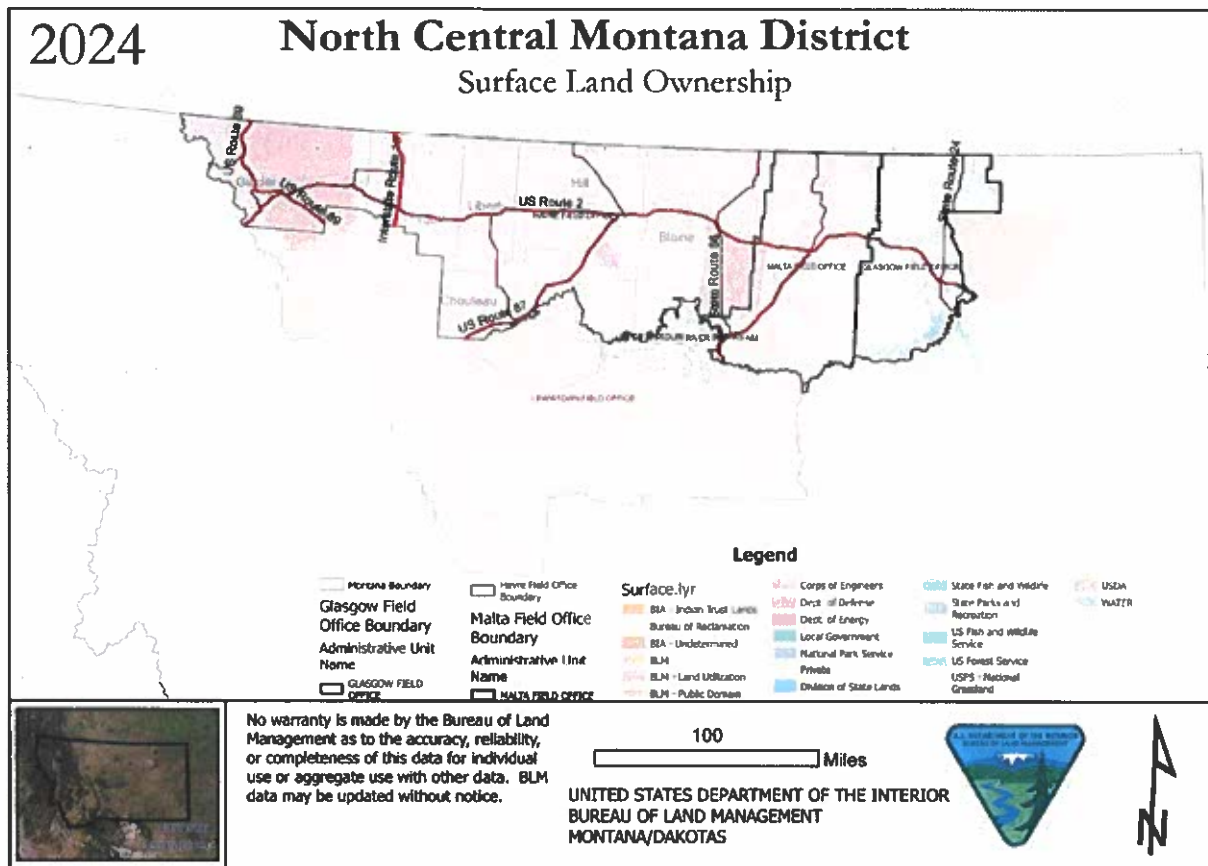


Figure 1: Map of North Central Montana District

3.2 Malta Field Office Recreation Programs

The MAFO currently manages a large and diverse recreation program that includes developed recreation sites, Off-Highway Vehicle areas, fishing reservoirs, and general recreation sites.

3.2.1 Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs)

The MAFO manages one SRMA (Little Rocky Mountains).

3.2.2 Extensive Recreation Management Areas (ERMAs)

The MAFO manages two ERMAs (Cottonwood Riparian Area and South Phillips Recreation Complex).

4 Little Rockies Developed Recreation Fee Sites

Currently, all four fee sites are in the scenic Little Rocky Mountains SRMA in north central Montana near the junction of U.S. Highways 191 and 66. The Camp Creek and Montana Gulch Campgrounds comprise fee area project MT11. Buffington (Buff's) Day Use Area is part of the

larger Camp Creek Recreation Area complex while the historic Zortman Ranger Station is in the town of Zortman located just southwest of the Camp Creek complex.

The Little Rocky Mountains are a heavily timbered isolated mountain range that rises abruptly from the surrounding plains, providing habitat for a unique mix of mountain and prairie wildlife. Camp Creek Campground is a Watchable Wildlife Area as well as a featured site on Montana's Northeastern Plains Birding Trail. All four sites are located within a 27,700-acre contiguous block of BLM administered public lands which is bordered to the north, east and west by the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. The Montana Gulch Campground (40 acres) is situated in the southwest of this block of public land next to the very small community of Landusky. Camp Creek Campground (80 acres), Buffington Day Use Area (2 acres) and Zortman Ranger Station (3 acres) are in the southeast portion of this block of public land near the slightly larger community of Zortman. Both communities were established because of the gold mining activities that began in the Little Rocky Mountains in the 1880s. Large scale, commercial gold mining occurred at the Pegasus gold mine located between Zortman and Landusky as recently as 1999 but, since the closing of the mine, small scale gold panning has become more of a recreational endeavor on placer mines in the area. The Pegasus mine is currently closed to the public due to the ongoing reclamation activities at the site. Primary land use in the Little Rocky Mountains area is currently ranching and recreation.

The Zortman Ranger Station, built in 1905, was part of the Lewis and Clark National Forest until 1965 when management of public lands in the area was transferred to the BLM. The building is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

The area is very rural with the nearest incorporated towns being Malta approximately 50 road miles to the northeast and Lewistown approximately 90 road miles to the southwest. Both campgrounds are located within Phillips County and are managed by the Bureau of Land Management out of the Malta Field Office.

4.1 Camp Creek, Horse Corral, and Montana Gulch Campground Customers

Wildlife viewing is just one of the many opportunities enjoyed by visitors to the campgrounds and surrounding area. Within a 20-mile radius and an easy drive from both campgrounds are several popular public recreational fishing ponds, Charles M Russell National Wildlife Refuge (CMR), Missouri River Breaks and a scenic auto tour route and wildlife viewing area on the CMR. A system of hiking and OHV trails cover much of the public lands within the mountain range with some crossing into the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation. In addition to wildlife, the area offers a wealth of cultural and archaeological history and has been designated a Traditional Cultural Property.



Figure 2: Typical campsite at Montana Gulch Campground.

Most visitors come from the rural communities of northeastern Montana (mainly Malta, Havre, Glasgow, Harlem and Dodson). The primary reason for this is that the area is remote and is not located near a high-use destination such as Yellowstone or Glacier National Parks. The Little Rocky Mountains offer an opportunity for families from these rural communities to escape the hot summer prairie temperatures and swarms of mosquitoes in a cool ponderosa pine setting for relatively little cost. The most common activities that these campground visitors engage in include camping, riding OHVs, hiking, horseback riding, fishing in the nearby ponds, hunting, wildlife viewing and family gatherings.

Many of these families stay at one or both campgrounds multiple times throughout the summer to ride their OHVs or horses on the area's trail system.



Figure 3: Typical campsite at Camp Creek Campground.

Camp Creek Campground, in recent years, has also become a destination for some visitors from outside the local area (mainly Saskatchewan, Billings and, in more recent years Williston, ND) who also enjoy using the trail system. But for the most part, visitation by non-locals is more casual and limited to overnight stays after seeing the campground signs on U.S. Highway 191 or 66 on their way to other destinations.



Figure 4: Corrals at Horse Corral camping area of Camp Creek Campground.

4.2 Buffington (Buff's) Day Use Area Customers

Buff's is utilized by individuals and groups as a parking site for day hikes, family and group gatherings such as picnics, reunions, church group outings and birthday parties. BLM receives several inquiries each year about reserving the site for weddings and other large gatherings. Having this site established as a fee area provides the opportunity for groups to reserve Buff's facilities for exclusive day use and allow BLM to establish supplemental rules for reserved use and collect fees to cover the additional administrative and maintenance costs.



Figure 5: Picnic shelters at Buff's Day Use Area



Figure 6: Concrete Cornhole game at Buff's Day Use Area

4.3 Zortman Ranger Station Customers

BLM anticipates that, once the renovations are completed at the Zortman Ranger Station, it will be a destination for local and non-local visitors who have an interest in local history, hunters, families and groups looking for locations for events such as retreats and family reunions. The amphitheater, which is part of the site, is also used for interpretive presentations.



Figure 7: Historic Zortman Ranger Station.

4.4 Seasons of Use

The recreation sites are used year-round with the highest season of use generally late May through August. Memorial Day weekend and Fourth of July are the busiest and both campgrounds usually fill up a few days before each of these holidays. The fall hunting season sees the next highest rate of use from September until the end of the big game rifle season in late November or until snowfall and cold weather limit access to the campgrounds and surrounding area. Birdwatchers and anglers make up most visitors during April and May. Winter use is low and is highly dependent on the amount of snow in the area as the access roads to the campgrounds are generally not plowed. Winter activities include snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling and mountain lion hunting. The campgrounds are open year-round but may not be accessible by highway vehicles at times due to snow accumulation.

4.5 Infrastructure and Improvements

Montana Gulch Campground offers 10 designated campsites each with a picnic table and fire ring. Each site is numbered. One day use family picnic area is also available with two picnic tables and a fire ring. Trash cans are also located near each site. One unisex vault toilet is centrally located in the campground and is accessible by road or foot trail from each of the sites. A self-pay station and campground information sign are located at the entrance to the campsite and picnic area. There is no potable water available within the campground so visitors must haul their own.

Camp Creek Campground offers 15 designated campsites in the main campground and 5 designated campsites in the Horse Corral area. Each campsite has 1-2 picnic tables and 1 fire ring, and bear resistant garbage containers, and is marked with a numbered post. Sites 5, 6 and 13 also provide a picnic table shelter. The main campground area has 1 set of horseshoe pits, 1 set of corn hole games, 2 drinking fountains and 1 designated woman's and 1 designated men's bathroom centrally located and accessible from each campsite by road or foot trail. Horse Corral has 1 drinking fountain, 1 unisex bathroom, and includes a public horse corral with 6 individual pens. Buff's Day Use area is also part of the Camp Creek complex and provides 1 unisex bathroom, horseshoe pits, corn hole games, volleyball court, fire rings and barbeque grills, trash cans, picnic tables, 2 picnic shelters and 1 information sign. The recreation area is bounded by large rocks and a rail fence to exclude motor vehicles for visitor safety. All the drinking fountains in the Camp Creek complex provide potable water via pipeline from the Zortman community. Regular water testing is done by the community of Zortman. Each fountain also provides a spigot with a backflow preventer. A self-pay station is available near the Camp Creek information sign and is used by visitors to the main campground as well as the Horse Corral sites. An additional self-pay station is located at the Horse Corral information sign, so visitors won't have to drive to the main campground to pay their fees.

A maintenance contract provides weekly trash pickup, bathroom maintenance, mowing, and general campsite cleaning and maintenance for Camp Creek, Buff's, and Montana Gulch during the months of May through November. Extra trash removal and facilities maintenance takes place during the periods of peak use. These sites are fenced to exclude free roaming livestock and periodically receive prescribed timber treatments to remove hazard trees, treat for insects, to reduce fuel loads and to manage for a healthy forest.

The exterior of the Ranger Station has been refurbished in recent years and the yard was landscaped to divert runoff to project the main building's foundation. The BLM is now in the process of refurbishing the interior of the building so it can be utilized as a year-round rental cabin. Currently, the site includes an outdoor amphitheater, storage shed, parking, outdoor water hydrant, flagpole, rail boundary fence and the main building. The main building has one bedroom, a living area, kitchen, enclosed porch, and bathroom. Once the interior of the building has been refurbished and furnished, it will provide beds for up to 6 people, running water, toilet and shower facilities, electricity, heat, stove, refrigerator, and various kitchen and living room furniture. Picnic tables and an information/interpretive kiosk will be added to the

site's exterior. In the future, the storage shed will be refurbished to provide more secure storage or will be converted into additional, warm weather sleeping quarters.

4.6 Other MAFO Developed Recreation Sites

Most other developed recreation sites are fishing reservoirs. Most of these are stocked frequently by Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks and managed as fisheries. There are 24 total and most have minimal development which usually includes having picnic tables and parking areas.

4.7 Special Designation Areas

The MAFO also manages several specially designated areas that include Areas of Critical Environmental Concerns (ACECs) (6), National Historic Trails (NHTs) (2), and Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) (1).

ACECs are BLM lands where special management attention is needed to protect important and relevant values.

The BLM goal for NHTs is to assist in cooperative efforts to manage current and future NHTs to protect values for which they were designated. In cooperation with trail administrator and other trail managers, both private and public, safeguard the nature and purposes; and conserve, protect, and restore the National Trail resources, qualities, values, and associated settings and the primary use or uses.

The BLM goal for WSAs is to manage them as not to impair their suitability for preservation as wilderness until such time as Congress either designates them as wilderness or releases them from further study. The objective is to protect and preserve wilderness characteristics of the existing WSAs (naturalness, solitude, and outstanding opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation).

5 Summary of Use and Collected Fees for Existing Fee Sites

The Little Rockies Developed Recreation Sites have experienced high levels of use over the past ten years. Table 2 summarizes total amount of Recreation Use Permits (RUPs), and fees collected by MAFO for Camp Creek Campground with visitor and payment information. Table 3 has the same information for Montana Gulch Campground. Table 4 shows Total Visits and Visitor Days Per Site reported by the MAFO in Recreation Management Information System (RMIS) for 2014-2023.

Table 2: RUP fees collected from Camp Creek (2014-2023) with visitor and payment info.

Year	Visitors	Days	Use Days	RUPs	Avg. Days	Avg. in Group	Avg. fee per use day	Avg. fee per person	Avg. fee per Use Day	Total Fees Collected
2014	642	625	1814	241	2.59	2.66	\$7.50	\$7.30	\$2.58	\$4,684.50
2015	721	496	1673	231	2.15	3.12	\$8.95	\$6.16	\$2.65	\$4,440.71
2016	658	617	1596	254	2.43	2.59	\$8.43	\$7.90	\$3.26	\$5,201.00
2017	615	475	1370	212	2.24	2.90	\$8.74	\$6.75	\$3.03	\$4,149.50

2018	448	354	980	167	2.12	2.68	\$8.68	\$6.86	\$3.13	\$3,072.00
2019	527	430	1111	210	2.05	2.51	\$8.61	\$7.02	\$3.33	\$3,702.00
2020	1085	769	2398	353	2.18	3.07	\$8.89	\$6.30	\$2.85	\$6,838.50
2021	649	572	1655	237	2.41	2.74	\$8.22	\$7.24	\$2.84	\$4,699.00
2022	608	657	1635	249	2.64	2.44	\$7.82	\$8.45	\$3.14	\$5,140.00
2023	584	591	1382	253	2.34	2.31	\$7.73	\$7.82	\$3.31	\$4,569.00
Average	654	559	1561	241	2.31	2.70	\$8.36	\$7.18	\$3.01	\$4,649.62

Table 3: RUP fees collected from Montana Gulch (2014-2023) with visitor and payment info.

Year	Visitors	Days	Use Days	RUPs	Avg. Days	Avg. in Group	Avg. fee per use day	Avg. fee per person	Avg. fee per Use Day	Total Fees Collected
2014	43	30	80	16	1.88	2.69	\$7.33	\$5.12	\$2.75	\$220.00
2015	281	183	736	85	2.15	3.31	\$8.64	\$5.63	\$2.15	\$1,580.88
2016	290	230	835	88	2.61	3.30	\$7.11	\$5.64	\$1.96	\$1,635.47
2017	209	143	452	68	2.10	3.07	\$7.24	\$4.95	\$2.29	\$1,035.00
2018	165	132	371	58	2.28	2.84	\$9.55	\$7.64	\$3.40	\$1,260.00
2019	212	196	553	87	2.25	2.44	\$7.32	\$6.76	\$2.59	\$1,434.00
2020	350	247	789	121	2.04	2.89	\$7.54	\$5.32	\$2.36	\$1,862.25
2021	207	165	534	74	2.23	2.80	\$7.01	\$5.58	\$2.16	\$1,155.90
2022	282	206	779	78	2.64	3.62	\$8.64	\$6.31	\$2.28	\$1,780.00
2023	191	148	490	74	2.00	2.58	\$7.68	\$5.95	\$2.32	\$1,136.00
Average	223	168	562	75	2.22	2.95	\$7.80	\$5.89	\$2.43	\$1,309.95

Table 4: Total Visitor Days by year for the previous 10-year period reported by MAFO in the Recreation Management Information System (RMIS). Numbers are estimated and based on observations, Recreation Use Permits (RUPs), traffic counter information, and other data.

Fiscal Year	Camp Creek Visitor Days	Buff's Visitor Days	Montana Gulch Visitor Days
2014	7,317	529	2,127
2015	7,683	582	2,658
2016	7,580	582	2,685
2017	8,152	582	2,685
2018	9,726	582	2,658
2019	10,236	582	2,658
2020	11,078	1,270	2,924
2021	11,542	1,270	2,924
2022	11,316	1,281	3,057
2023	11,707	1,296	3,084

Table 5: Total Visitor Days for all sites for each of the three HiLine Field Offices reported in RMIS for the previous 5-year period (2019-2023).

Fiscal Year	Malta Field Office Visitor Days	Glasgow Field Office Visitor Days	Havre Field Office Visitor Days
2019	32,651	14,927	15,719

2020	35,861	16,053	16,592
2021	36,288	16,171	16,633
2022	36,223	16,074	16,564
2023	36,790	16,138	16,702

5.1 Fee Implementation

BLM began charging \$3.00 for overnight camping use at Montana Gulch and \$5.00 for overnight camping use at Camp Creek in the early 1980s. A RUP is issued for the use of the Camp Creek Campground and an expanded amenity fee of \$10.00 per campsite per night/day and \$8.00 per campsite per night/day for Montana Gulch Campground. These fees were established in January 2014. Table 6 outlines how the site meets the FLREA criteria for expanded amenity fees. Visitors with a Golden Age or a Golden Access Passport receive a 50% discount. There is no day use fees for either campground. No reservation system is in place, so campsite and picnic area use are on a first come first serve basis. Each campground currently provides one self-pay fee pedestal and an informational sign listing the campground rules and fee payment instructions. Fees are due year-round at both campgrounds. "Iron ranger" self-pay fee collection pedestals are used as the primary fee collection system. BLM Law Enforcement Rangers and other Malta Field Office staff monitor the campgrounds for camping fee compliance. It is estimated that fee compliance is 90% + during the primary use seasons. The fees collected are currently used to pay for maintenance and improvements to existing campground features and facilities and to purchase new signs.

6 Proposed Modification to MAFO Recreation Fee Rates

BLM is proposing to increase overnight fees at Camp Creek and Montana Gulch Campgrounds to levels consistent with other camping areas in the region and increase fees for Buffington Day Use Area and the Zortman Ranger Station. Increased fees proposals will be presented to the Eastern Montana Resource Advisory Council (RAC). Public scoping will be completed through a news release. This updated Business Plan, and an associated Federal Register Notice are being submitted as part of the process to increase fees at these sites.

6.1 Analysis of Recreation Fee Rates

The BLM is authorized to use either the Cost Recovery Fee Calculation Method or the Fair Market Value Fee Calculation Method to determine appropriate fees at recreation sites. The Cost Recovery Method assumes that fee revenues should cover the recreation site's operating costs. The Fair Market Value Fee Calculation Method compares fee rates to those charged by other area recreation sites that provide similar opportunities.

The MAFO has chosen to use the Fair Market Value Fee Calculation Method to ensure that reasonably affordable rates for the region while allowing fees to support labor, operations, and maintenance of these sites to the highest extent possible. Table 6 summarizes recreation fees within the region with amenities like those provide by the MAFO Recreation Sites.

Table 6: Comparison between current and proposed fees and amenities that each recreation site provides.

Ownership	Recreation Site	Current Fees	FY25 Proposed Fees	Amenities
BLM	Camp Creek	\$ 10/night	\$ 20/night	RV and tent spaces, picnic tables, fire rings, vault toilets, serviced bear resistant garbage cans, horseshoe and cornhole pits, potable drinking water, horse corrals, picnic shelters, graveled access road, and parking.
BLM	Montana Gulch	\$ 8/night	\$ 16/night	RV and tent spaces, picnic tables, fire rings, vault toilet, serviced bear resistant garbage cans, graveled access road, and parking.
BLM	Buff's Day Use	\$30-50/day (\$30 for 1 picnic shelter, \$50 for entire site)	\$ 60-100/day (\$60 for 1 picnic shelter, \$100 for entire site)	Picnic tables and shelters, fire rings, barbeque pits, vault toilet, serviced bear resistant garbage cans, volleyball, horseshoe and cornhole pits, potable drinking water, large grass areas to accommodate large groups, graveled access road, and parking.
BLM	Historic Ranger	\$75/night	\$ 100/night	Electric range,

	Station		(when renovations are completed)	heat, water heater, lights, fixtures, and outlets, potable drinking water, shower, sinks, furniture, and beds to sleep 4-6. Parking, perimeter fencing, large lawn, and a large adjacent amphitheater with seating is also included.
Non MAFO Recreation sites in the vicinity				
Ownership	Recreation Site	Current Fees	Notes	Amenities
BLM	James Kipp Recreation Area	\$12/night		Fire rings, picnic tables, vault toilets.
APR	Antelope Creek	Cabin \$71/night Tent \$19/night RV \$38/night		Electricity, water, showers, Wi-Fi, dumping station.
USFS	Crystal Lake	RV/tent \$20/night		Fire rings, picnic tables, potable water.
Private	Buckhorn Cabins	RV \$45/night RV \$400/month Cabin \$95 Cabin \$105 w/kitchen	-extra \$45/person	Full Hookups
Corps of Engineers	West End Tent and Trailer Campground (Fort Peck)	Tent \$15/night RV \$25/night		Fire rings, picnic tables, vault toilets.
Corps of Engineers	Downstream (Fort Peck)	Tent \$15/night RV \$30/night		Picnic tables and shelters, fire rings. Electricity
Hill County	Beaver Creek Park	RV/tent \$15/day Larger group \$140.40/day		Picnic table, fire ring, garbage, toilet.

				(similar to Buff's)
Private	Hell Creek Recreation Area	RV/tent \$35/night		Electric hookups, picnic table, fire ring, showers and flush toilets nearby.

6.2 Impacts from Charging and Not-Charging Recreation Fee Rates

The primary purpose of the proposed fees is to maintain and preserve the investment that the public has made into the MAFO recreation sites and to provide the visitor services that are expected at developed recreation sites.

The proposed fees and fee increases would help to increase staffing for maintenance and visitor services, commensurate with significant recent increases in visitation and associated needs and pressures, as well as helping to offset the rising costs of operating these sites.

6.3 Impacts from Modifying Fees to Recreation Users

BLM campgrounds and day-use areas remain an affordable option within the region for recreation users. The MAFO considered the cost to run and maintain these sites as well as using the Fair Market Analysis to come up with a new proposed fee schedule. Fee increases would not be more than \$10/night (e.g., from \$10 to \$20 dollars). These fees, like all fees, do have the potential to displace some recreation users.

The addition of electronic fee payment methods and reservation systems will increase access to these systems regardless of time of day or season which may be beneficial to some recreationists. Additionally, an increasing portion of the population prefers to pay electronically instead of with cash.

BLM has considered impacts on local economies by assuring fees are only assessed at sites that meet the FLREA criteria for standard or expanded amenities. Additionally, the MAFO does offer many areas, both developed and undeveloped, for visitors to enjoy their public lands without paying fees. These areas do not require the same level of investment, facilities, maintenance, or services. These sites throughout the MAFO are still available to the public to use for free throughout the year.

6.4 Impacts from Not Modifying Fees to Recreation Users

Maintaining the current fee structure (e.g., no change in fees) at the MAFO would likely result in interruptions to visitor services and decreased user satisfaction. This conclusion is based on actual observed conditions, especially during the dramatic recreating increases experienced between 2020 and present. Over that time, many of the current fee sites have experienced significant disruptions in visitor services due to lack of maintenance, lack of staffing, or lack of funding, while also experiencing higher demands due to dramatically increased visitation. Not modifying the existing fee structure would result in continued lack of maintenance and visitor services provided. Additionally, the MAFO would possibly have to reduce the visitor services available at these fee sites as current operation costs continue to increase over time. Deteriorating facilities due to lack of maintenance and reductions in visitor services will

significantly reduce the publics' experiences. There may also be an increase in conflicts between user groups due to limited services.

7 Justification for Increasing Fees

Since Camp Creek and Montana Gulch Campgrounds were established, visitor use has steadily increased. Motorized use of the area has rapidly increased in the last 10 years. The Zortman Community, with the help of PhillCo Economic Growth Council, Travel Montana, and various social media platforms have begun to promote the Little Rockies area as a destination for eco-tourism groups and families. While historic use of the campgrounds has been mainly from local residents, these promotional activities have led to an increase in non-resident visitors. As recreation use continues to increase, additional impacts from visitors with require more work and demand to maintain and improve recreational facilities and natural resources.

Several improvements have been made in the past several years. Gravel was added to the access roads and campsites, two sets of concrete Cornhole game boards installed, bear resistant garbage containers installed, and new signage installed.

As shown in Tables 2 and 3 above, the average fee per use day is significantly lower that the established fees. This is larger due to more visitors purchasing passes that entitles them to pay half price for camping. In the past few years nearly half of all visitors are paying the discounted fee. This is great news other than this results in fewer fees being collected and utilized locally. The office that sells the pass retains the funds for the pass sales whereas collected RUP fees are retained locally for maintenance and improvements which are becoming more crucial in supplementing annual recreation budgets. With our current climate of flat or reduced recreation budgets, retaining RUP fees is becoming increasingly more critical to maintain and improve recreation sites.

Additionally, lack of funding for additional recreation staff has resulted in MAFO having to contract out cleaning and maintenance of the fee sites. This cost has steadily increased over the past 10 years and contract costs significantly out pace income that the campgrounds bring in.

Table 7: Maintenance Contract Amount vs. RUP fees collected and percentages for 2014 vs. 2023.

Maintenance Contract Year	Contract Amount	Collected RUP fees	Net difference	Percentage of contract covered by RUP fees
2014	\$ 13,900	\$ 4,904	(\$ 8,996)	35%
2023	\$ 19,728	\$ 5,705	(\$ 14,023)	29%
Increase	42%	\$ 801	\$ 5,027	

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, inflation, and other factors, costs and shipping of common campground amenity items, supplies, services, wages, and other items have drastically increased in the past few years.

Table 8: Cost comparison and percentage increase of items in 2017 vs. 2024.

Item	2017 Cost	2024 Cost	Percent Increase
Vault Toilet	\$ 18,000	\$ 28,000+	55%
Aluminum Picnic Table (8 foot)	\$ 786	\$ 1,500	90%
Recycled Picnic Table (8 foot)	\$ 584	\$ 1,370	134%
Campfire Ring	\$ 156	\$ 344	120%
Pumping a Vault Toilet	\$ 200	\$ 625	212%
Gallon of gasoline	\$ 2.41	\$ 3.50	45%
GS-04 hourly salary	\$ 14.07	\$ 16.95	20%

8 Administration and Labor Costs

The campgrounds are administered by the MAFO Outdoor Recreation Planner located at the Malta Field Office. Day to day maintenance from May through November is completed by a local contractor. The area is patrolled by the BLM Ranger and Phillips County Sheriff's Office deputies.

Construction, road maintenance, tree/brush removal, maintenance, and rehab of structures, and signing projects are done by Force Account workers, road grading contractor, Zortman fire crew, and seasonal employees. Fee collection, planning and public information activities and all off season duties are handled by the Outdoor Recreation Planner. Fee deposits and processing of RUPs is done by the Administrative Assistant in Lewistown. The campground maintenance contract is generally administered by the Contracting Officer in the State Office and the Outdoor Recreation Planner in Malta.

Table 9: Average approximate salary expenses for BLM staff administration and maintenance of Camp Creek and Montana Gulch campgrounds Buff's Picnic Area, and Historic Zortman Ranger Station per fiscal year (based on 2024 work month estimates).

Staff	Average Work Month Cost	Approximate Work Months	BLM Salary Expense
Outdoor Recreation Planner	\$9,200	2.0	\$18,400
Law Enforcement	\$9,200	1.0	\$9,200
Engineering/Force Account	\$7,600	1.0	\$7,600
Seasonal employees and fire crew	\$5,000	1.0	\$5,000
Administrative	\$5,200	.50	\$2,600
TOTAL			\$42,800

9 Maintenance and Operating Costs

A campground maintenance contract provides general day to day cleaning and maintenance for the campgrounds including cleaning vault toilets, supplying toilet paper, mowing, picking up trash, weekly trash removal, and cleaning out fire rings. The six vault toilets are pumped almost every year, depending on use. Since the fees collected at the two campgrounds are not sufficient to cover all the maintenance and operation costs for these sites, the balance of these annual costs is paid from the L1660 Annual Maintenance fund.

Table 10: Estimated annual maintenance and operating costs based on most recent actual costs.

Maintenance and Operating Costs	BLM Costs
Campground Maintenance Contract (CY2014)	\$19,728
Vault Toilet Pumping	\$ 2,400
Vehicle/Fleet Expenses	\$ 8,000
Miscellaneous Supplies and Signs	\$ 2,000
TOTAL	\$ 32,128

10 Future Improvements and Planning

Travel management planning for the Little Rockies Travel Management Area (TMA), which includes the fee sites described in this Business Plan and their associated network or trails, began in spring 2013. Route inventory and a draft route evaluation have been completed for the area and travel planning is expected to be finalized in 2025. Once the travel management planning process has been completed, TMA maps and signs will be made available at each fee site. There may be opportunities to partner with Montana OHV groups and the local community to develop these materials. It is anticipated that travel management funding will be available for this project, but cost of materials and maintenance may have to be supplemented with campground collections.

BLM is also proposing a fee increase for reserved use of the Zortman Ranger Station. Reservations will be handled through the BLM Malta Field Office and will allow groups or individuals to reserve the buildings and outdoor facilities at the site for exclusive day or overnight use. Groups and individuals that reserve the site will pay fees directly to the Malta Field Office and will sign an agreement stating the rules and regulations for use of the site. The proposed \$100/day or night fee (Table 6) will help cover some of the costs of administering the reservation program and additional trash removal and site maintenance. The proposed fee was arrived at by comparing fees at sites within BLM and the state of Montana with similar amenities.

11 Revenues

In addition to fees collected from RUPs (Tables 2 & 3), Special Recreation Permit (SRP) fees are also collected and are established by the Director and are adjusted periodically to reflect changes in cost and to ensure fair return for the use of public lands. SRP fees are currently 3% of adjusted gross income or \$7/per/day with a minimum annual fee of \$130. A reserved site fee of \$260 is due when applicable.

In 2024, the MAFO administered 6 SRPs. This number fluctuates somewhat from year to year as permittees retire or sell their businesses or as new applicants are approved. The current SRPs include permitting of commercial uses such as hunting, fishing, guided tours, and organized group activities.

Revenue generated from these SRP fees helps offset the cost of administering the program and provides increased visitor services and monitoring of commercial use activities. Fees are used to cover the costs of additional SRP conformance patrols by BLM staff during the hunting seasons, contracting cleaning service for vault toilets in high-use areas where multiple SRP operating areas overlap, maintenance of facilities and additional signage needs for put-in and take-out areas used by permittees along the Marias River, and marking of Wilderness Study Area (WSA) boundaries and authorized routes where SRP operating areas overlap the Bitter Creek and Burnt Lodge WSAs. BLM also has the potential to build new partnerships with local organizations that could improve recreation experiences and expand resources.

Table 11. Summary of HiLine Revenues for the previous five years (2019-2023) for RUP and SRP fees.

Year	RUP Revenue	SRP Revenue	Total
2019	\$ 5,136	\$ 12,721	\$ 17,857
2020	\$ 8,701	\$ 16,010	\$ 24,711
2021	\$ 5,855	\$ 20,606	\$ 26,461
2022	\$ 6,920	\$ 23,625	\$ 30,545
2023	\$ 5,705	\$ 23,975	\$ 29,680

12 Public Outreach

The BLM notified and involved the public at each stage of this process.

- A public comment period on the draft business plan ran from September 18, 2024, through October 18, 2024.
- The public comment period announcement was distributed to more than 30 news media outlets having local and statewide audiences, plus the BLM-Montana/Dakotas social media pages, collectively having more than 25,000 followers.
- The announcement was also emailed to Montana Congressional staff, state legislators, county commissioners and Tribes, encouraging them to share the information with their constituents and members.
- Additionally, on September 11, 2024, BLM planners provided an overview briefing to the Missouri Basin Resource Advisory Council and public attendees during a routine business meeting in Glasgow, MT.
- BLM planners again briefed the MBRAC on January 16, 2025, updating them on public input received, outreach conducted and the resulting final recreation business plan.
- The final plan was recommended for approval by the MBRAC on January 16, 2025.