



**Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project
FERC Project No. 1869**

Recreation Management Plan



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Executive Summary

NorthWestern Energy (NorthWestern) operates and maintains several key recreation sites as part of its Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project (FERC Project No. 1869) (Project), including Power Park, Island Park, Wild Goose Landing Park, the South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area, and the Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site. These sites consistently receive high marks for visitor satisfaction and low levels of crowding, as confirmed by regular surveys. Visitation levels have remained stable over time, with consistent patterns of use.

Each site offers unique recreational opportunities:

- **Power Park** features picnic facilities and a large group use area.
- **Island Park** provides a natural setting to view fish passage, dam infrastructure, and scenic waterfalls.
- **Wild Goose Landing Park** and the **Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site** offer reservoir access and boat launching facilities.
- **South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area** allows shoreline access along the Clark Fork River for fishing and informal recreation.

All facilities are open to the public free of charge, supporting equitable access to outdoor recreation.

As part of its ongoing commitment to enhancing public amenities, NorthWestern will invest over \$4 million in major renovations at Wild Goose Landing Park. These improvements will create a modern, safe, and accessible space for all visitors.

To ensure these sites continue to meet public needs, NorthWestern will regularly monitor visitor use, satisfaction, and facility conditions.

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1.0 Introduction

The Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project (Project) is located on the Clark Fork River in Sanders County, Montana, adjacent to the city of Thompson Falls (City). Non-federal hydropower projects in the United States (U.S.) are regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) under the authority of the Federal Power Act. The Project is licensed by FERC as Project No. 1869.

1.1 Purpose of Plan

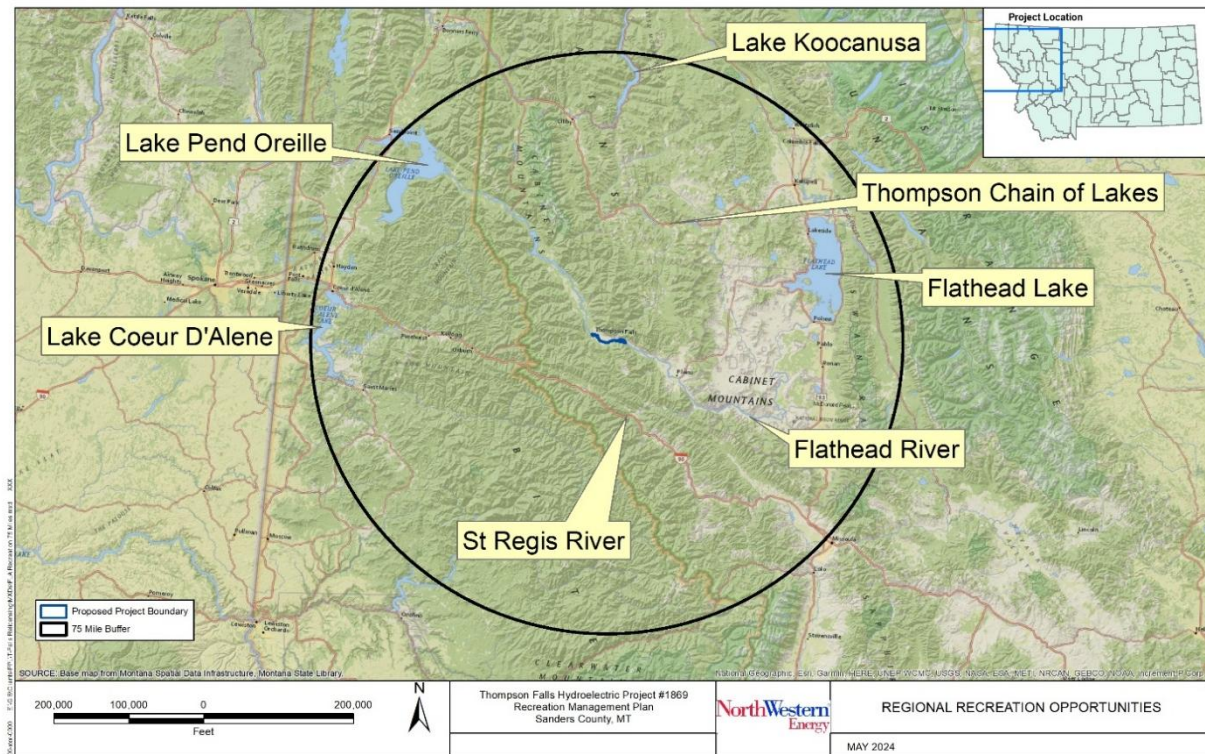
The purpose of this Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project Recreation Management Plan (Plan) is to address management of Project recreation sites over the term of the new License. The Plan identifies and describes the sites, amenities, and measures that will be implemented to manage the recreation sites associated with the FERC-licensed Project. Amenities exist at Power Park, Island Park, Wild Goose Landing Park, and the Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site that enhance access or support desired recreation opportunities and experiences, while the South Shore Dispersed Use Area is managed as a primitive site in natural settings with no improved facilities.

This Plan describes measures for managing the recreation sites and provides for on-going consultation with stakeholders to ensure sites meet the needs of the recreating public, as identified through visitor and site condition monitoring, in the Project area over the term of the license.

1.2 Regional Recreation in the Project Vicinity

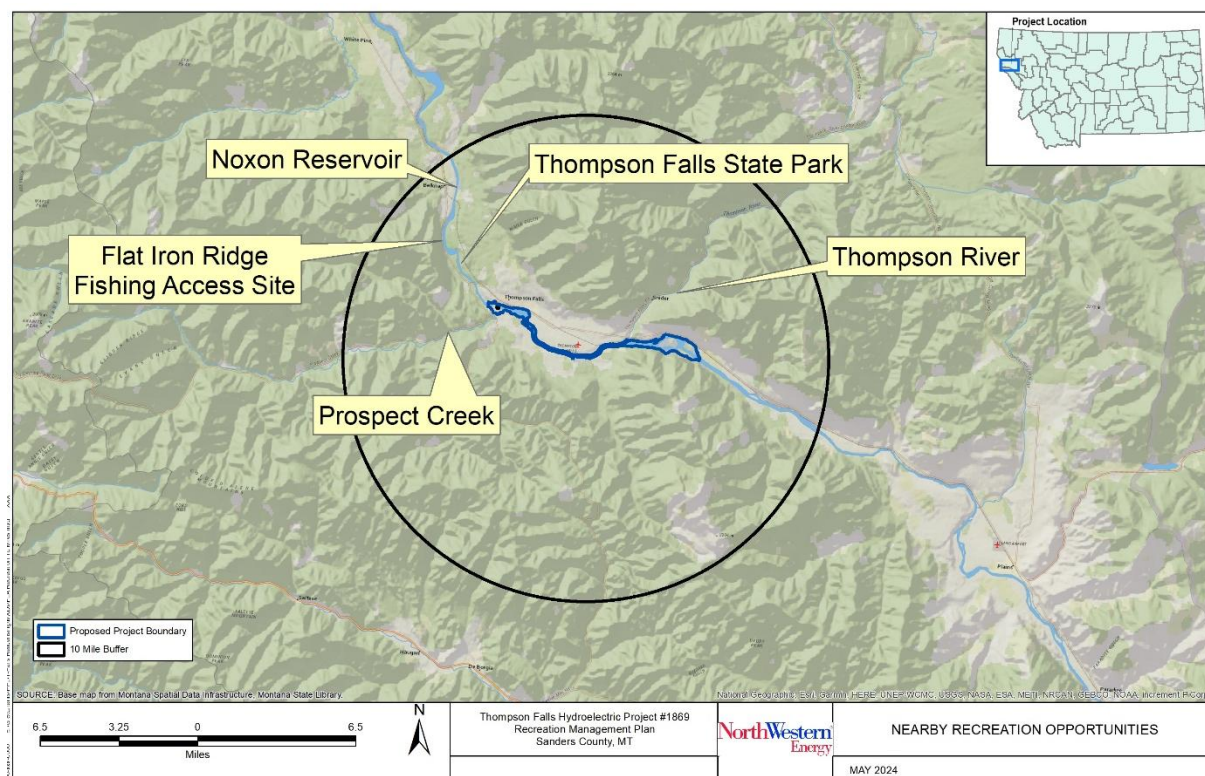
A wide variety of recreation opportunities exist within a 75-mile-radius of Thompson Falls, including hiking trails, camping areas, Forest Service lookouts, lakes, rivers, forest roads, and others. Sites and settings for recreation are managed by a mix of federal, state, tribal, and local agencies, as well as private entities. Some notable areas within the 75-mile-perimeter include Flathead Lake, Lake Koocanusa and the Thompson Chain of Lakes in Montana, Lake Pend Oreille and Lake Coeur d'Alene in Idaho, and the Flathead and St. Regis rivers in Montana (**Figure 1-1**).

Figure 1-1: Recreation areas within a 75-mile-radius of Thompson Falls.



Near the Project, within a 10-mile-radius, are recreational trails, campgrounds, fishing access sites, and water-based recreation opportunities. Notable areas include Thompson River, Noxon Reservoir, Flat Iron Ridge Fishing Access Site, Thompson Falls State Park, and Prospect Creek (Figure 1-2).

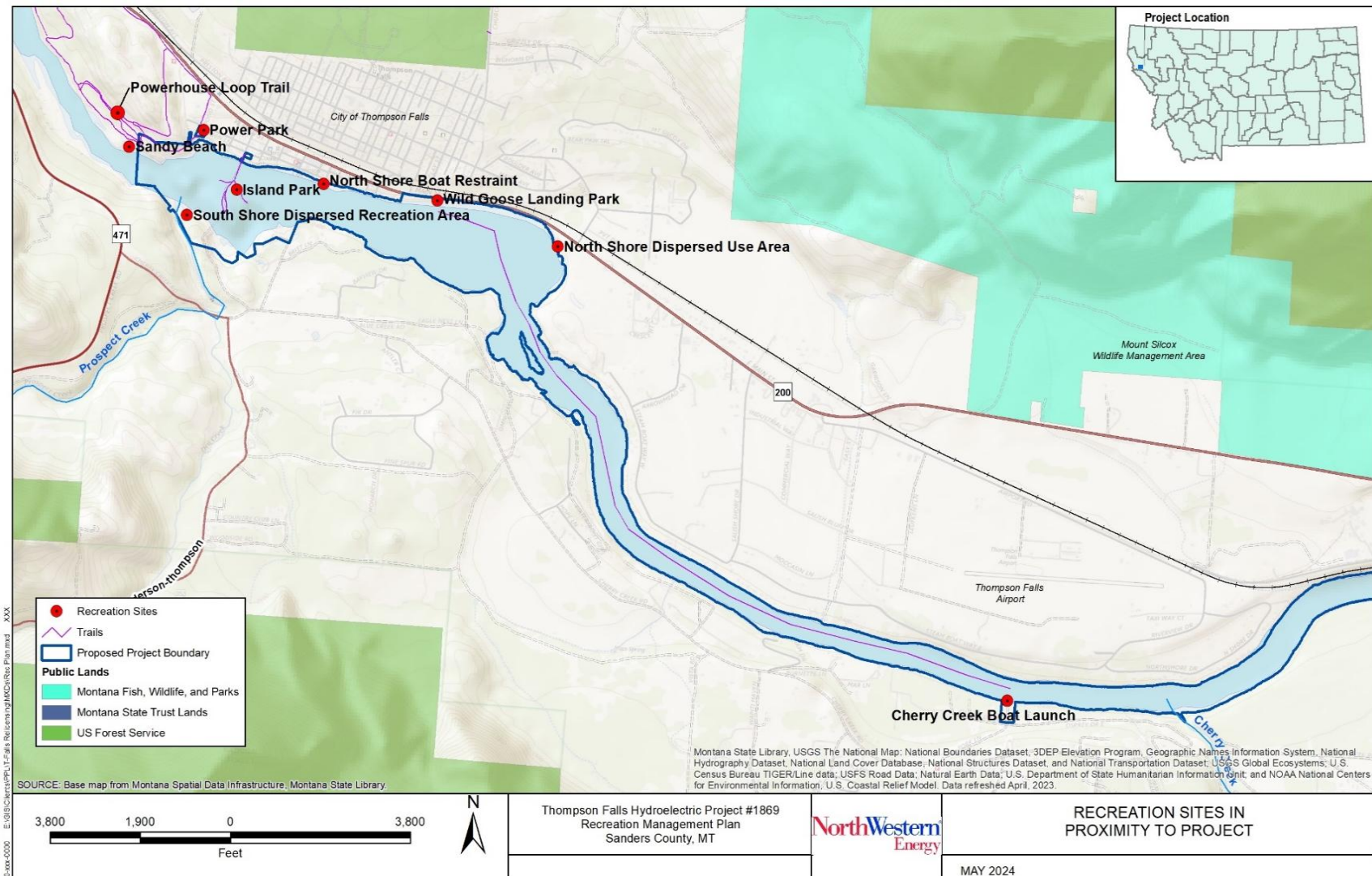
Figure 1-2: Recreation areas within a 10-mile-radius of Thompson Falls.



In the immediate vicinity of the Project, nine developed and dispersed recreation sites offer trail-based recreation, shoreline access to the Thompson Falls Reservoir and the Clark Fork River, boat launching facilities, picnic facilities, and user conveniences such as a group use pavilion and toilet and trash facilities. Eight of the nine recreation sites are situated in the area roughly 1 mile above and 1 mile below the Main Channel Dam, while the ninth site, Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site, is located about 4 miles upstream (**Figure 1-3**).

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Figure 1-3: Recreation sites in proximity to the Thompson Falls Project



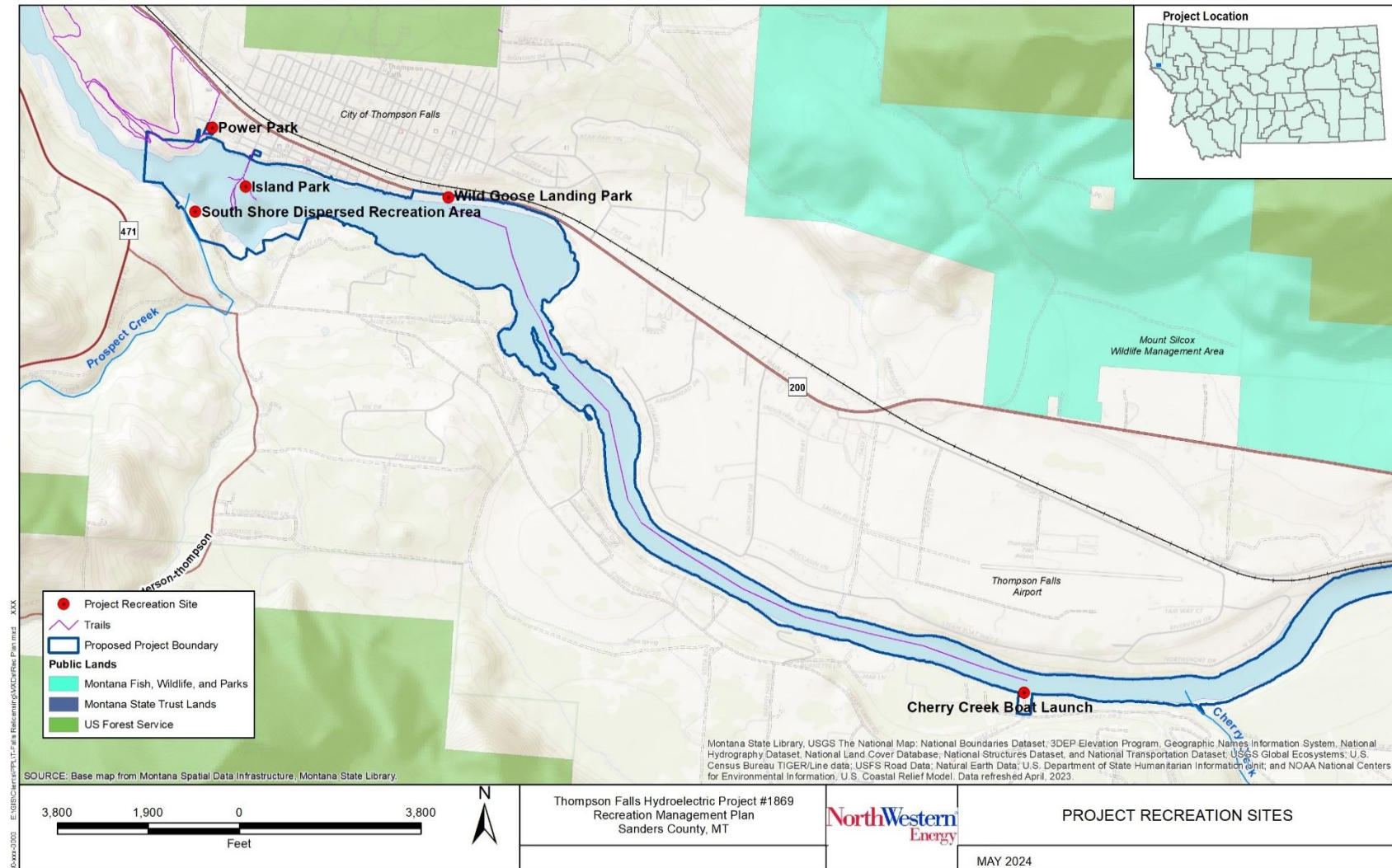
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2.0 Project Recreation Sites

Pursuant to this Plan, NorthWestern will operate and maintain five Project recreation sites: Power Park, Island Park, Wild Goose Landing Park, the South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area, and Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site (**Figure 2-1**). The following section describes these Project recreation sites and summarizes Project amenities at each site.

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Figure 2-1: Map of Project Recreation Sites.



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2.1 Power Park

Power Park is a neighborhood park within the proposed FERC Project boundary (**Figure 2-2**). NorthWestern owns approximately 75 percent of the park property with the remaining 25 percent owned by the City, over which NorthWestern holds an easement allowing it to use the City-owned portion as a recreation site. Project amenities at the site include a group-use pavilion with running water, electrical plug-ins and countertops, an ADA-accessible restroom facility, concrete sidewalks linking site facilities, drinking water station, trash cans and collection service, benches, numerous picnic tables, a site welcome sign and a large hydroelectric information sign (FERC Part 8 sign) (**Photographs 2-1**). Use of the site is offered free of charge for year-round public day use from dawn to dusk. Plumbed facilities (pavilion sink, drinking fountain, and plumbed restrooms) are offered free of charge during the peak recreation season (Memorial Day – Labor Day), and will be winterized and unavailable during non-peak seasons. Site management responsibilities include mowing, irrigation, weed management, hazardous tree monitoring, trimming, and removal, trash collection and litter pick-up, cleaning and stocking restrooms during the peak recreation season, and winterizing water lines during cold months to prevent breakage.

Figure 2-2: Power Park Project Recreation Site and Facilities.



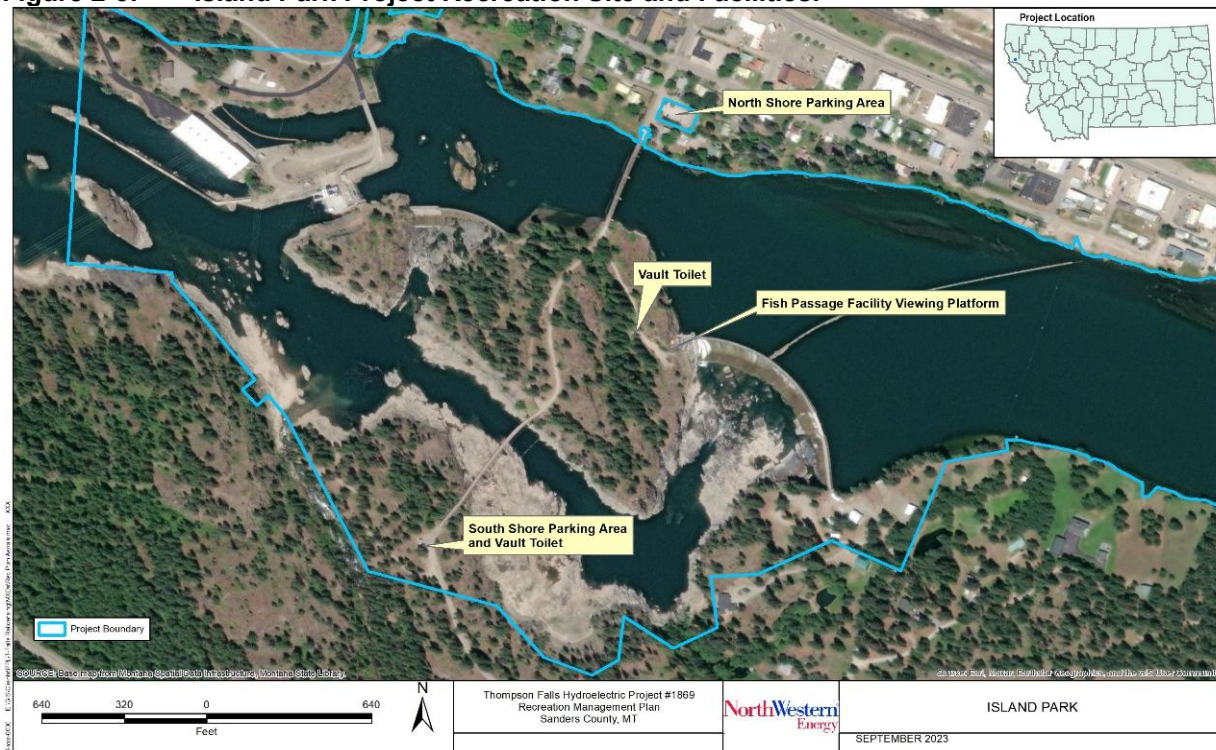


Photographs 2-1: Photos of Power Park

2.2 Island Park

Island Park is located between the Main Channel Dam and Dry Channel Dam (**Figure 2-3**). The 22-acre park is almost entirely on NorthWestern property, with a small portion (less than 0.5 acre) at the north shore abutment under City ownership over which NorthWestern holds an easement allowing it to use the City-owned portion for ADA parking and access control. Parking areas on the north and south shorelines allow for visitor walk-in access to the site via the Gallatin Street Bridge on the north and the Historic High Bridge on the south. The bridges are owned, operated, and managed by Sanders County and are non-Project amenities. Project amenities associated with Island Park include the North and South Shore Parking Areas (each with 1 ADA-accessible parking spot), vault toilets (on the island and at the South Shore Parking Area), benches and picnic tables throughout the park, a viewing platform overlooking the Main Channel Dam and fish passage facility, a pedestrian trail connecting the county bridges to the viewing platform, site welcome signs, and numerous interpretive panels (**Photographs 2-2**). The park and the North and South Shore Parking Areas (including the vault toilet at the South Shore Parking Area) are included in the proposed Project boundary and managed by NorthWestern. The site and Project amenities are available free of charge for year-round public day use (dawn-dusk). Site management responsibilities include weed management, hazardous tree monitoring, trimming, and removal, trash collection and litter pick-up, and cleaning and stocking vault toilets during the peak recreation season (Memorial Day – Labor Day).

Figure 2-3: Island Park Project Recreation Site and Facilities.





Photographs 2-2: Photos of Island Park.

2.3 Wild Goose Landing Park

Wild Goose Landing Park is a developed recreation site within the proposed Project boundary (Figure 2-4). About half the site is located on NorthWestern-owned property and half on City-owned property over which NorthWestern holds an easement allowing it to use the City-owned portion as a recreation site. The park is available free of charge for year-round public day use (dawn to dusk). Plumbed restroom facilities are offered free of charge during the peak recreation season (Memorial Day – Labor Day) and will be winterized and unavailable during non-peak seasons. Site management responsibilities include mowing, irrigation, weed management, hazardous tree monitoring, trimming, and removal, trash collection and litter pick-up, and cleaning and stocking restrooms during the peak recreation season.

Figure 2-4: Wild Goose Landing Park Project Recreation Site and Facilities.



2.3.1 Existing Facilities

Currently, Project amenities at Wild Goose Landing Park include a boat launch, courtesy launch dock and swimming dock, an access road, parking, plumbed restroom facility, picnic facilities, and a site sign (**Photographs 2-3**). Recreation users are satisfied with the facilities (NorthWestern 2022).

NorthWestern identified aspects of the site that could be improved or are in need of replacement. The boat launch, while functional, is challenging to use due to the angle of approach. The permanently anchored dock becomes vertically separated at lower water levels making access to boats more challenging. The boat launch is also located adjacent to the swimming area, posing a risk of conflict between recreationists swimming and those launching or retrieving their boats. Currently there is erosion along the shoreline near the boat launch that may be exacerbated by waves from boat traffic. Additionally, the current restroom is closed due to its dilapidated state (NorthWestern currently provides portable toilets), the parking facilities are outdated, and there are potential issues with stormwater management. Below, in Section 2.3.2, NorthWestern describes the significant improvements to Wild Goose Landing Park that it will undertake to enhance recreation at the Project.



Photographs 2-3: Photos of Existing Facilities at Wild Goose Landing Park.

2.3.2 Significant Site Improvements

To continue a strong record of good environmental stewardship, NorthWestern proposes to invest over four million dollars in an extensive renovation of Wild Goose Landing Park. NorthWestern has developed a conceptual master plan that includes significant measures to enhance recreation at the Project (**Figure 2-5**).

The conceptual master plan includes a new boat launch, separated swimming area, accessible pathways, nature play areas, picnic spaces, and restrooms. Extensive site updates include modernized utilities, expanded parking, and improved stormwater management using rain gardens and drainage swales. To address shoreline erosion, NorthWestern proposes to stabilize the shoreline with habitat-friendly features such as woody debris matrix banks and/or vegetated retaining walls. Selected conceptual renderings of these planned site improvements are provided below (**Figure 2-6**).

NorthWestern proposes to complete these improvements within five years of license issuance. Prior to implementation, NorthWestern will obtain all necessary permits, abide by all regulatory requirements, and adopt appropriate best management practices to address temporary environmental effects of construction activities.

Figure 2-5: Conceptual Master Plan for Significant Improvements at Wild Goose Landing Park



1 TIERED RAIN GARDEN WITH NATIVE VEGETATION

2 OPEN LAWN

3 EXISTING SHORELINE VEGETATION

4 ACCESSIBLE PICNIC TABLE

5 SMALL PICNIC SHELTER

6 RESTROOM

7 RELOCATED KIOSK WITH VISITOR INFORMATION

8 ASPHALT DAY USE PARKING (13 STANDARD STALLS, 1 ADA STALL)

9 CONCRETE SIDEWALK

10 EXISTING ROCK OUTCROPPING

11 NATURE PLAY WITH LOGS AND BOULDERS

12 VEGETATED BUFFER

13 NATIVE BUNCH GRASS, MEADOW AND PINES

14 LARGE PICNIC SHELTER

15 SWIMMING AREA (DOCK, RAMP, BEACH AND SWIM BUOYS)

16 BOAT RAMP AND DOCK

17 ASPHALT TRUCK AND TRAILER PARKING (5 STANDARD STALLS, 1 ADA STALL)

18 CONCRETE WHEEL STOP BARRIERS AND GRAVEL ISLAND WITH SWALE

19 FISHING NODES

20 SEASONAL DOCK STORAGE

21 BIKE RACKS, TRASH ENCLOSURE, DRINKING FOUNTAIN AND WASH STATION

22 ADA PARKING

23 ENTRY SIGN



Wild Goose Landing Recreation Improvements - Master Plan

December 2024



Figure 2-6: Renderings of Planned Significant Site Improvements at Wild Goose Landing Park

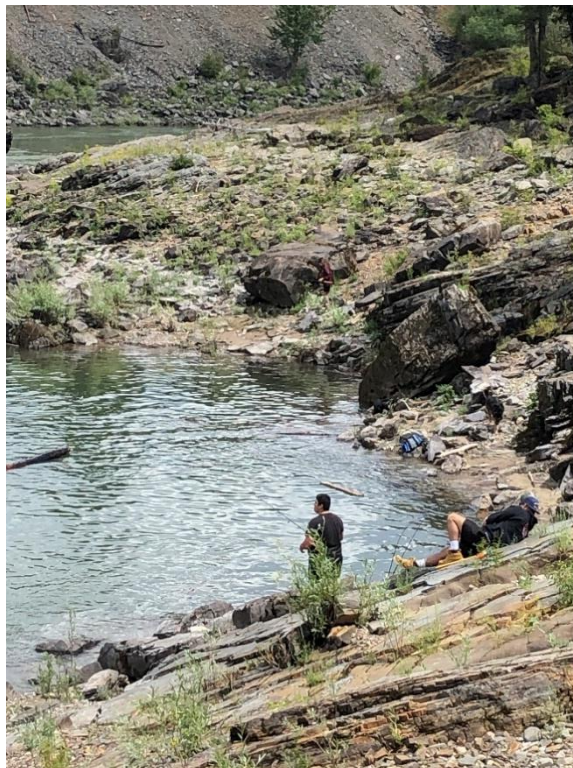




2.4 South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area

The South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area (South Shore) is a primitive shoreline access area on the south shoreline of the Clark Fork River, adjacent to the mouth of Prospect Creek, below the dams (**Figure 2-7**). The site is included in the proposed Project boundary. Project facilities include the access road, dispersed parking area, and dispersed shoreline areas, all of which are located on NorthWestern property and managed by NorthWestern as primitive areas (**Photographs 2-4**). The site is available free of charge for year-round public day use (dawn to dusk). Dispersed parking is available at the site during the peak recreation season (Memorial Day – Labor Day), and during the winter months at the nearby South Shore Parking Area (which is managed as a component of Island Park), where a vault toilet is also available during the peak recreation season. Site management responsibilities include weed management, hazardous tree monitoring, trimming, and removal, and litter pick-up.

Figure 2-7: South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area Project Recreation Site and Facilities.



Photographs 2-4: Photos of South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area.

2.5 Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site

The Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site is a day use site approximately four miles upstream of the Main Channel Dam (**Figure 2-8**). The site is located on Sanders County property over which NorthWestern holds an easement allowing it to operate and maintain the recreation site. Project amenities include a small boat launch and floating courtesy dock, a day use area with picnic facilities, and a vault toilet (**Photographs 2-5**). Site management responsibilities include weed management, hazardous tree monitoring, trimming, and removal, litter pick-up, and operation and maintenance of the picnic facilities, vault toilet restroom, boat launch and dock.

NorthWestern will maintain the picnic facilities, vault toilet restroom, boat launch and dock. NorthWestern will also complete one-time improvements to the boat launch, including relocating the dock landing to be directly adjacent to the launch and extending the existing dock or replacing it with a new dock.

Figure 2-8: Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site Project Recreation Site and Facilities.





Photographs 2-5: Photos of Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site.

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3.0 Recreation Monitoring

Recreation visitor monitoring has been conducted at the Thompson Falls Project since the early 1990s pursuant to Article 406 of the 1990 FERC license amendment (FERC 1990). Visitors were surveyed during the peak season (Memorial Day weekend – Labor Day weekend) in 6 different years since 1990, most recently during the peak recreation season in 2021. Visitor surveys documented visitor and trip characteristics, including previous site use, length of visit, group size, recreation activity participation, motivations to visit, opinions about the adequacy of recreation facilities, any problems encountered, and visitor demographics.

Over time, while visitor and trip characteristics have remained fairly consistent and visitor satisfaction has remained high, visitors' desire for changes to recreation facilities or management have declined. This decline in visitors' perceived needs for additional facilities is assumed to be largely due to the numerous upgrades made to recreation sites and expansion of recreation opportunities in the Project area since 2008. Upgrades have largely consisted of additional amenities such as trails, benches, and picnic tables, as well as more toilet facilities and designated parking areas.

The 2021 Thompson Falls Recreation Visitor Survey (NorthWestern 2022) revealed that more than three-fourths of all visitors were from Montana (78%) and more than one-third (36%) were from Thompson Falls. Visitors from Washington and Idaho comprised 16 percent of all visitors (10 and 6%, respectively). Most (60%) were repeat visitors, while 40 percent were making their first visit.

Overall, 85 percent of all visitors in 2021 indicated they were very or extremely satisfied with the site they were using. Additionally, feelings of crowding were low, with 96 percent indicating they felt not at all or not very crowded. Being outdoors and enjoying nature were primary motivations for visits, and visitors reported experiencing no problems of any kind during their visit.

Examination of the volume of visitor use at recreation sites has also been conducted during the peak recreation season in recent years using automated technologies that allow for monitoring vehicle or pedestrian access to recreation sites. When coupled with visitor and trip characteristics gathered by the recreation visitor survey, this information provides a more complete picture of recreation site use.

Peak-season use monitoring of Project recreation sites revealed roughly 33,000 group visits were made to Project recreation sites¹ during the peak recreation seasons of 2020, 2021, and 2022. Of the total use at these sites, 45 to 51 percent occurred at Wild Goose Landing Park, 34 to 37 percent occurred at Island Park, 7 to 9 percent occurred at South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area, and 6 to 13 percent occurred at the Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site over the 3-year timeframe (**Table 3-1**).

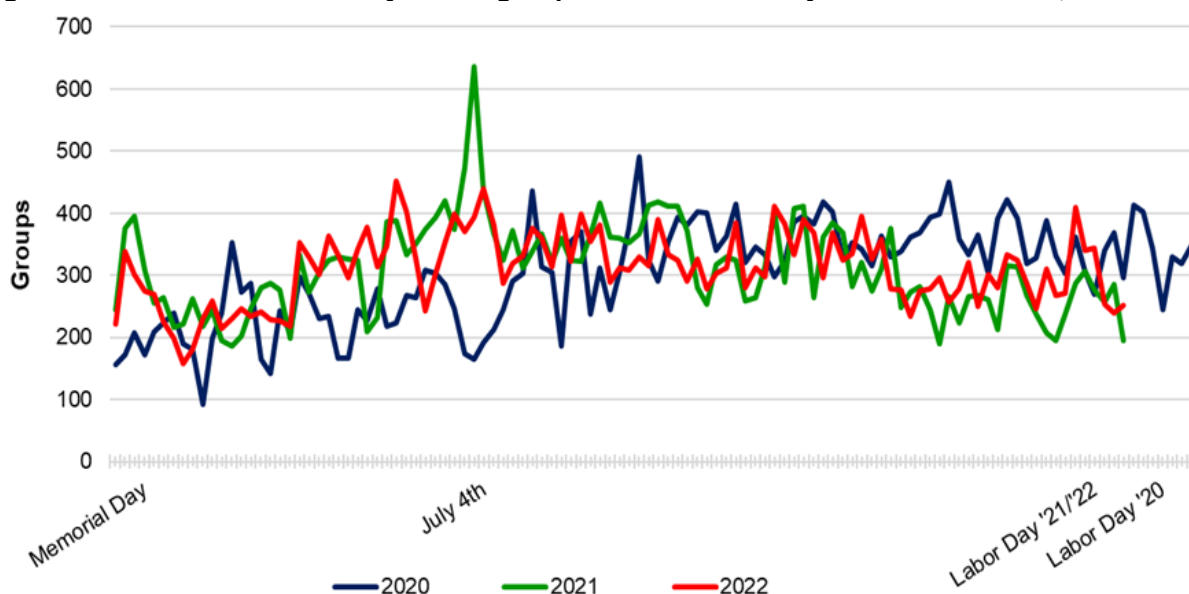
Table 3-1: Peak season visitation estimates to Project recreation sites.

Recreation Area	2020 Peak Season: # Group Visits (% of total)	2021 Peak Season: # Group Visits (% of total)	2022 Peak Season: # Group Visits (% of total)
Wild Goose Landing Park	15,198 (45%)	16,649 (51%)	16,131 (49%)
Island Park	11,866 (35%)	11,091 (34%)	12,086 (37%)
South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area	2,217 (7%)	2,819 (9%)	2,556 (8%)
Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site	4,603 (13%)	2,105 (6%)	1,860 (6%)
Total Visitation to All Monitored Sites	33,884	32,664	32,633

In general, combined visitation to these monitored sites is fairly consistent over the course of the peak recreation season (**Figure 3-1**). Visitor use of Wild Goose Landing Park, the South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area, and Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site peaks during the middle part of the season (generally on or around the July 4th holiday) since these sites are primarily used for waterway access. Use of Island Park is typically highest in the early season, when runoff is high and views of water passing through the Main Channel Dam and the natural falls below are spectacular.

¹ Estimating the use of Power Park with automatic counters is not possible due to the varied nature of access to the site.

Figure 3-1: Peak season daily visitor groups to monitored Project recreation sites, 2020-2022.



Recreation visitor surveys will be conducted every 12 years in the Project area beginning in 2036, to include input from visitors to Project and non-Project recreation sites. Project site and facility condition assessments will also be conducted every 12 years beginning in 2036, and visitation data to Project sites will be collected using automated counters, as feasible², on an annual basis.

A Recreation Report will be produced every 12 years that summarizes monitoring information, and will include assessment of visitor satisfaction and opinions, recreation activities engaged in, motivations for engaging in recreation visits and site selection, visitor demographics, recreation site visitation estimates, and site and facility conditions.

The Recreation Report will identify significant issues, concerns, or needs for improvements to meet recreational demand at Project recreation sites. NorthWestern will provide a 30-day comment period for the City of Thompson Falls and Sanders County. Comments received will be considered and addressed in the final Recreation Report, along with NorthWestern's determination of any necessary measures to ensure Project recreation resources adequately meet public needs. The Recreation Report will be filed with FERC on September 15 in the year following the visitor survey. Significant modifications to Project recreation sites and amenities will be subject to review and approval by FERC.

² Visitor volume data at some sites, such as Power Park, cannot be captured with automatic counters due to the varied nature of access to the site.

Visitor monitoring under the current license was conducted at intervals that coincided with FERC's Form 80 reporting requirement, which had been adjusted periodically over time and was on a 6--year interval near the end of the current license term. The Form 80 filing requirement was removed in 2018³. Visitor surveys over the term of the current license reveal that the Thompson Falls recreation visitor base is stable and has not changed significantly over time. Therefore, it is reasonable to extend the visitor monitoring interval from the former 6--year interval to a 12--year under the new license. A 12-year monitoring interval will accommodate four monitoring events during a 50-year license, and the final monitoring event will occur 3 years before the 50--year license expires.

³ 165 FERC 165 FERC ¶ 61,256 Elimination of Form 80 and Revision of Regulations on Recreational Opportunities and Development at Licensed Hydropower Projects

4.0 Summary

NorthWestern will operate and maintain Power Park, Island Park, Wild Goose Landing Park, the South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area, and the Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site as Project recreation sites. High levels of visitor satisfaction and low ratings of crowding have been documented through visitor surveys. The volume of visitation to recreation sites is quite stable and patterns of use have been consistent over time.

Ongoing management of Project recreation sites will offer a diverse set of opportunities to the recreating public, including picnic facilities and a large group-use area at Power Park, a natural setting to view fish passage, dam facilities, and natural falls at Island Park, reservoir access and boat launching facilities at Wild Goose Landing Park and the Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site, and shoreline access on the Clark Fork River below the dams for fishing and dispersed recreation at the South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area. These opportunities and facilities that support visitor use will be provided free of charge to the recreating public.

NorthWestern will perform extensive renovations and improvements that will enhance recreation at Wild Goose Landing Park by creating a modern, safe, and accessible park. The estimated total cost for these improvements is over four million dollars.

Visitor use and satisfaction, as well as site facility conditions, will be monitored at regular intervals to ensure that Project recreation amenities meet the needs of the recreating public.

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5.0 Citations

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) 1990. Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project (P-1869). Order Amending License (Major). April 30, 1990.

NorthWestern Energy (NorthWestern). 2022. Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project P-1869. Final Study Report - Visitor Use Survey. April 2022.

<https://www.northwesternenergy.com/docs/default-source/default-document-library/clean-energy/environmental-projects/thompson-falls/thompson-falls-relicensing/p1869-isr-visitor-use-survey.pdf>

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