

# Montana State Parks and Recreation Board Policy



Classification and Prioritization of Park Resources		
Chair Approval <i>Thomas E. Jones</i>	Effective Date 12/16/15	Review Date 12/16/18

**Board Policy**

The allocation of resources to manage Montana State Parks and serve visitors will be done by using a systematic prioritization method aligned with statute, rule, and policy, consistent with the 2015-2020 Strategic Plan and considerate of the safety of park visitors and resources.

**Purpose**

This policy identifies the approach State Park Staff and the Montana State Parks and Recreation Board (Park Board) will use for resource allocation within the park system, with special consideration for staffing, operational funding and capital development.

**Background**

Since the establishment of the park system, Montana State Parks has consistently been challenged with adequately serving customers and protecting resources given the large number of park properties. Historically there has been a lack of appreciation and understanding for the park system and recreation programs. Funding and staffing levels have remained stagnant over time. The system also has a growing backlog of deferred maintenance needs and declining facilities. These challenges put Montana’s state park system in the bottom 10 percent of systems in the country with respect to financial support and staffing.

The 2015 Strategic Plan directs staff to complete several analytical processes to ensure investment in state parks aligns with the most significant, relevant and accessible sites, while also improving visitor experiences and expectations of diverse site types and opportunities.

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## **Directives**

This policy addresses each of the goals identified in the strategic plan through the following four directives:

- 1. Prioritize resource allocation within the park system to improve visitor experiences, resource management/maintenance, and fiscal responsibilities based on the classification system.**
  - a. Manage sites based on the classification groupings. Allocate fiscal, staff, and capital resources first to sites that have the highest significance, relevance, and accessibility based on the classification analysis completed by staff in 2015.
  - b. Reallocate existing resources. Following consultation with local community leaders, the general public, and other affected stakeholders, redirect existing resources within the division to reach staffing and operating budget standards and meet facility needs.
  - c. Prioritize development in higher groupings. To ensure visitor expectations are met and experiences are high quality, development at more significant, relevant, and accessible sites may become a priority over reinvestment in lower ranking sites.
  - d. Maintain flexibility for lower groupings that may present public safety and health concerns. Resource allocation may allow for investment in discretionary and emergent issues to maintain safe experiences overall.
  - e. Reprioritize programs and services within individual parks. To ensure maintenance and safety are the priority customer needs, it may be appropriate to shift time and focus within an individual park.
  - f. Consider moving sites to new classification groupings if circumstances change significantly over time. Staff may re-evaluate the significance, relevance and accessibility of a site using the classification criteria when conditions significantly change or as policy is reviewed.

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- 2. Rename properties consistent with recreation experiences to align public expectations with site conditions.**
  - a. Sites that have the highest significance, relevance and accessibility (and thus meet the brand promise) will carry the title name "State Park." Customer expectations and experiences are weakened when all sites are referred to in the same manner.
  - b. Rename sites in lower groupings to be consistent with the visitor experience and expectations of that site.
  - c. Present a consistent naming approach to the Park Board. Before comprehensively changing site names across the system, staff will bring forth a proposal for the Board to approve.
  - d. Marketing and communication will align with the brand promise.
- 3. Clarify messages about division funding to build knowledge and support of the park system.**
  - a. Staff will communicate with affected stakeholders about decisions. Communicate with local citizens, stakeholders, friends groups and other agencies to enhance understanding and support for reallocation decisions.
  - b. Staff will seek out new partnerships and operating agreements and engage all types of affected user groups.
- 4. Align management and fees with services to improve the fiscal position of the State Park system while maintaining accessible and affordable experiences regardless of classification grouping.**
  - a. Public lands will stay public. The Strategic Plan directed that public lands will remain in the public trust, regardless of outcome. Staff may seek alternative management approaches to close gaps in funding or to better align sites with the brand promise and visitor expectations.
  - b. Regardless of site type or grouping, all fees must be consistent with levels of service and Board rules.

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- c. Plans will be developed for parks that meet the brand promise first, with other sites to follow as appropriate. Business plans will be developed to enhance revenues and expand opportunities for private sector investment.

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Decisions made under this policy may be reviewed by the Board at any time. Staff is strongly encouraged to go beyond minimum guidance outlined here as part of their professional commitment to the safety, service, stewardship, and sustainability of lands and resources under the care and jurisdiction of the park system.

## **Authority/Reference**

23-1-101, MCA, State Parks Purpose.

23-1-102, MCA, Powers and Duties of the Department

23-1-111, MCA, Powers and Duties of the Board

Attachment

I:\Parks & Recreation Board\Board Policies\FINAL MSP Classification Policy 12.9.15.doc

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## CLASSIFICATION GROUPINGS

*An evaluation of site significance compared to site relevance and accessibility to prioritize management and investment.*

***Class 1 sites are most significant, relevant, and accessible.***

### CLASS 1

#### **CLASS 1A**

Bannack  
Flathead Lake  
Lewis & Clark Caverns  
Makoshika

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#### **CLASS 1B**

Chief Plenty Coups  
Cooney  
First Peoples Buffalo  
Jump  
Giant Springs  
Missouri Headwaters  
Pictograph Cave  
Smith River  
Thompson Chain of  
Lakes/Logan  
Tongue River Reservoir  
Travelers' Rest

### CLASS 2

Fish Creek  
Madison Buffalo  
Jump  
Medicine Rocks  
Milltown  
Rosebud Battlefield  
Sluice Boxes

### CLASS 3

Beavertail Hill  
Black Sandy  
Brush Lake  
Frenchtown Pond  
Hell Creek  
Lake Elmo  
Lake Mary Ronan  
Lone Pine  
Placid Lake  
Salmon Lake  
Spring Meadow  
Thompson Falls  
Whitefish Lake/Les  
Mason

### CLASS 4

Ackley Lake  
Anaconda Stack  
Beaverhead Rock  
Clarks Lookout  
Council Grove  
Elkhorn  
Fort Owen  
Granite  
Lost Creek  
\*Marias River  
Painted Rocks  
Pirogue Island  
Prairie Dog Town  
Tower Rock  
\*Yellowstone River

\*Sites not scored

# MANAGEMENT APPROACHES

