Clark Fork Islands Recreation Management Plan

The Clark Fork Islands recreation management plan describes recreation management priorities and infrastructure on the Clark Fork Island Property. Inventories conducted by the Parks and Recreation Department's Conservation Lands management (CLM) employees (Carlson, Valliant & Jandreau 2018) and resource values documented by Missoula's Conservation Lands Advisory Committee (CLAC) identified multiple natural and social resources which influence management of this parcel. Limited site surveys identified multiple Montana State plant and animal species of concern (SOC) on the property including: Lewis's woodpecker, Western toad, great blue heron, and Westslope Cutthroat. Bald eagles and bull trout, two federally listed threatened and/or endangered species are also present on the property. Information from these limited inventories was critical for development of the recreation management strategies described in sections 2-4 of this document. More in depth inventories on the property are need to fully understand habitat values on site. This plan describes the trail system, public access points, approved recreational uses and infrastructure locations. While the Clark Fork Islands Recreation Management Plan describes actions to protect site-specific resources on the Property, management of all other natural and cultural resources is directed by the Conservation Lands Management Plan (CLMP), Missoula Parks and Recreation (MPR) Department policies and various City ordinances.

The Clark Fork Islands property is comprised of multiple individual parcels acquired by the City through a variety of mechanisms (Fig. 1). The Clouse and Kolendich parcels were purchased using 2006 Open Space Bond funds and constitute the majority of the Clark Fork Islands Property. Riparian areas behind the City's Wastewater Treatment Plant and Garden City Compost have been owned by the City for decades and were likely acquired by the City to buffer the Treatment Plant. A small parcel, dedicated to the City by the Wagon Wheel subdivision, provides an important access point at the end of Hiberta Street. While not formally managed by the City, two county parcels along the south bank of the Clark Fork River are managed in conjunction with the Greater Tower St. Conservation area and the transfer of these parcels from the County to the City has been recommended in other planning documents. Northwest of the Clark Fork Islands property, land still owned by the Clouse family but leased by City Wastewater for a hybrid poplar plantation contains a conditional easement for future public access, and may eventually provide public access along the Old Milwaukee Railroad Line, known as the Milwaukee Trail.

In early 2017, based on surveys of natural resources conducted by Missoula Parks and Recreation and conservation criteria documented in Missoula's Conservation Lands Management Plan, Missoula's Park and Recreation Board designated the land acquired by the City from the Clouse family as a "Park Preserve" (Valliant et. al., 2010). This designation requires the majority of the Clark Fork Islands Property to be managed in conjunction with the

greater Tower St. Conservation Area. All other parcels, excluding the Kolendich property and a management corridor along the Milwaukee trail (Fig. 1) shall also be managed as part of the Clark Fork Islands Nature Preserve. The Kolendich property provides a unique "transition" from areas of high development onto an area conserved and managed for native habitat and natural processes. A portion of the Kolendich property was dedicated as part of a housing development off Hamilton Way with the intent of providing a public playground for the neighborhood, and the majority of the property will be utilized to extend the Milwaukee Trail. The Kolendich property will be managed as an "Urban Parkland with Special Resources Present", as defined by the 2010 Conservation Lands Management Plan. A subsequent master park planning process will define levels of development for the Kolendich parcel and identify ways to responsibly develop the area to suit neighborhood needs and protect important natural resources on site.

1. NAMING*:*

Assigning names to specific trailheads and trails is an important component of wayfinding on City Conservation Lands. The intent of the following recommendations are to supply basic place names for the Property and to recognize donations of land and access easements which made this project possible. Future naming rights, will follow the official naming policy adopted by the MPR Department and Board.

Place Name: In the past decade, the system of City-owned Conservation Lands in this area has steadily grown. Between 2006-2011, land acquisitions and parkland dedications created the 120+ acre City-owned Tower St. Conservation Area (Fig. 1). A conservation easement across 80ac. of land owned by the Stahl family connected the Tower St. Conservation Area to Kelly Island (a 648 ac. State-owned natural area). With the acquisition of the Clouse property, the City now owns and manages roughly 265ac. along 2 miles of the Clark Fork River, west of the Reserve St. Bridge (Fig. 1). As these lands are managed as one contiguous Conservation Land versus multiple individual parcels; they should share a name. Rather than expanding the boundaries of the Tower St. Conservation Area to include these new acquisitions the entire 246ac. area (including the Tower St. C.A.) will be renamed the "Clark Fork Islands Nature Preserve".

Koly Park: As a condition of the land transfer, the Kolendich family stipulated that the park built on the Kolendich property should be named "Koly park" in honor of the Kolendich family. The MPR Board has already taken official action and named the park "Koly Park".

2. TRAILHEADS AND ACCESS POINTS*:*

All access points and associated infrastructure should be built above the 100 year-floodplain line and/or be removable in case of flooding. Basic amenities (e.g. signage, kiosks,

trash/mutt-mitt, parking etc.) for Primary, Secondary and Local access points and basic trail construction guidelines (by designated trail-use) are described in the 2010 Conservation Lands Management Plan. In addition to the standardized City Ordinances and MPR rules, regulations and trail etiquette signs found on other Conservation Lands installing educational signage about the importance of healthy riparian habitat, land conservation, and responsible recreation at Primary and Secondary access points will reinforce the importance of this area for local flora & fauna.

Primary Access Trailhead: The Wastewater Trailhead (Fig. 2) will provide access to public Conservation Lands in an area of town where few opportunities exist. Eventually, this access point will also provide neighbors with a connection to the Milwaukee Commuter Trail. This trailhead should be designed as a Primary access point with considerations for river access. If appropriate, the site may be suitable for a boat ramp. However, this decision should be made as part of a larger river-use planning effort in coordination with other land management agencies and the public. As trail connections expand use of this trailhead will increase. Trailhead construction should be phased in over time. Until the Milwaukee Trail is reconnected across the river, the Wastewater Trailhead should be constructed as a Secondary Access Trailhead.

Secondary Access Trailhead: The Railroad bridge trailhead (Fig. 2) sits at a transition between areas of urban development and intact natural riparian areas. It will serve as an entryway to the Clark Fork Islands Nature Preserve. As recreationists leave Koly park and cross onto the Clark Fork Islands Nature preserve, signage at the Railroad Bridge Trailhead will educate users about resource values, changing rules and regulations and trail connections. The level of infrastructure at this location will be commensurate with what is found at other secondary trailheads but with no parking provided.

Local access points: The Hamilton Way Neighborhood Access (Fig. 2) will provide local residents an entry to Koly Park. At a minimum, basic park signage with Park rules and regulations will be posted on site. Dependent on future master plans for Koly Park, a trash receptacle and mutt-mitt dispenser may also be appropriate at this location.

The Hiberta St. Neighborhood Access (Fig. 2) has provided seasonal local access to the Clark Fork River for decades. Formalizing this access with basic park rules and regulations signage, a trash receptacle and mutt-mitt station will reduce impacts and waste on adjacent public lands. Before this area is developed, it is important to verify property boundaries, and access agreements along the Orchard Homes levee.

3. TRAILS AND RECREATIONAL USE:

The majority of the Clark Fork Islands property is active floodplain. Seasonal floods activate side channels, inundate low lying lands and occasionally the main river channel will migrate into new areas. While these natural processes make access to, and trail development on, the Property difficult they are critical for healthy riparian habitat. These flood cycles will limit recreational access to portions of the property during spring run-off and damage trails. It is essential to design and build floodplain-trails which can withstand, and/or be easily rebuilt after seasonal flooding. To reduce conflict with vulnerable spring bird-nesting sites, in general, final trail layouts should avoid side channels, dens willow thickets and active bald eagle nests. The majority of the trails depicted in Figure 2, and described below, will be natural surface trails situated away from actively eroding banks and ephemeral Clark Fork River side channels. To limit trespass onto adjacent private property and protect areas with high densities of Lewis's woodpecker nest sites (regional species of concern) no trails will be built and public access will be discouraged on two locations of the property (Fig. 2). Unless otherwise noted, trails in the area will be open to dogs under voice restraint.

Milwaukee Commuter Trail: Extension of the Milwaukee Road Commuter Trail across the Clark Fork Islands Nature Preserve (Fig 2.) will occur as time and funding allows. The presence of a high use commuter trail crossing a natural floodplain managed for native habitat will present land managers with unique challenges and opportunities. The juxtaposition of urban infrastructure (a commuter trail) in a nature preserve is already relatively common in Missoula, where natural areas are often found within areas of dense urban development. The Clark Fork Islands Nature Preserve and the Kim Williams trail will effectively bookend the heart of Missoula's Milwaukee Line Commuter Trail creating a unique experience for trail users. Inevitably, thru traffic across the Clark Fork Islands Nature preserve will be distracted by babbling side channels; bald eagles fishing the Clark Fork River; and beaver working cottonwood groves. Opportunities to educate trail users about the site as well as plans to provide appropriate access points to adjacent natural area trails are described in Section 4 of this document.

The Milwaukee Line Commuter Trail will be open and managed per existing Ordinances and practices for primary commuter routes. This includes remaining open for 24hours, use of class 1 & 2 electric assist bikes, and potential installation of trail lighting and winter maintenance. Final design of the Milwaukee Line Commuter Trail will occur as part of a separate planning process. The recommendations in this document will guide final design of the commuter trail to help balance commuter trail use with conservation goals in the Nature Preserve. The majority of the existing Milwaukee Line is a paved with asphalt. The section of the Milwaukee Line to be built across the Clark Fork Islands Nature Preserve should be designed to promote green

infrastructure and reduce the runoff of petro-chemicals into the Clark Fork River. Alternative paving methods which will provide a hardened trail surface for commuters (which may or may not be permeable) should be explored. If economically and structurally feasible, replacing the creosote soaked timbers on the existing railroad bridge should be explored as an option for retrofit of that bridge. If trail lights are provided for this section of trail, design considerations should include ways to reduce visual impacts (in excess of current adopted dark-sky initiatives) and impacts to wildlife. Except in cases of overwhelming public and/or habitat conservation benefits future requests for installation of public utilities along this trail corridor (except what is need for trail infrastructure) should be denied.

Garden City Ponds Trail: The backwater sloughs and ponds located behind the City's Compost facility (Fig. 1) provide unique wetland habitats on the property, which should be protected and improved for the benefit of local flora and fauna. An inventory of these wetlands (Carlson, Valliant & Jandreau 2018) identified significant use of the area by migratory water fowl, western painted turtles, Western toads (MT. State species of concern) and the locally rare water potato (*Sagittaria latifolia*). Water potato is a culturally significant plant for Native American tribes. Limiting recreational use of these sloughs and ponds (and other sloughs and side-channels on the property) and working to reestablish native vegetation where it has been removed are management priorities for this area. If user created river access points develop in this area they should be aggressively closed. At some point in the past a gravel road was built through the North Bank sloughs effectively creating the Garden City Compost Ponds (Fig. 1). This road is essential for construction of the Garden City ponds Trail but also effectively severs surface water input to the ponds. Land managers should explore the possibility of installing culverts under this road to reconnect and restore these waterbodies. The Garden City Ponds Trail and the associated small spur trail due south of the Wastewater Treatment Plant (Fig. 2) will be initially constructed as a 4ft. wide natural surface trail designated as Pedestrian-Only. When the Milwaukee Line is reconnected across the river the main Garden City Ponds Trail will be improved (packed gravel), widened (6-8ft) and open to non-motorized traffic.

Birding Loop Trail: The confluence of the Bitterroot and Clark Fork Rivers has long been recognized by local birders as a critical habitat for migratory and resident birds. The Clark fork Islands Nature Preserve is located within the Audubon society's Clark Fork River/Grass Valley Important Bird Area (National Audubon Society). Conserving this habitat, has been recognized in multiple City/County Open Space Management Plans and prioritized through community acquisitions of Kelly Island (approx.. 700 ac. managed by MT. Fish, Wildlife, and Parks: FWP), the Tower St. Conservation Area (120 ac. managed by the City of Missoula), the 80 ac. Stahl easement, and the recent Clouse property acquisition (foundation of the Clark Fork Island Nature Preserve). The Tower St. Conservation Area was the last City Open Space property purchased before the creation of the Conservation Lands Management Program, and

unfortunately no formal recreational plan was developed or implemented for the site. Recreational impacts on that property have been extensive including significant loss of riparian vegetation, accumulation of dog waste, extensive trail creation and observable reductions in bird usage of the property. To protect habitat and provide quality wildlife viewing opportunities on site, the Main Island on the Clark Fork Islands Nature Preserve will be closed to dogs (Fig. 2). An 18”-24” natural surface pedestrian-only loop trail will be constructed around the island for the purpose of wildlife viewing. Final location and layout for this trail will be determined through a collaboration with Five Valleys Audubon. If warranted, and maintained through a partnership, temporary seasonal bird blinds constructed of natural materials would be appropriate along this trail. No trails or infrastructure should be constructed in this area until appropriate public access can be provided from Koly park via the Milwaukee Line.

H*iberta St. Seasonal Trails:* The islands at the Northern end of Hiberta St. (Fig.2) have had a long history of use. A diffuse system of user-made trails already exists on these islands and construction of a formal trail loop will also require closure and rehabilitation of some user-made trails. Given that use of this area will be seasonal (activated side-channels limit use from early-spring to mid-summer) an 18-24” natural surface pedestrian-only trail will be sufficient to meet community needs.

Public Hunting: Both waterfowl and archery hunting has occurred on many of the Clark Fork Island parcels for decades. While waterfowl hunting is a traditional use on the property. The use of firearms and potential impacts to wetlands is not compatible with long-term habitat management goals and other forms of public recreation on-site. When this parcel is annexed into the City Limits use of firearms on the property will become illegal unless managed as part of a hunting management plan between the City and MT. FWP. Since municipal acquisition of the Tower St. Conservation Area MT. FWP has successfully managed archery hunting of white-tailed deer on that 120 ac. parcel. Conflicts between trail users and bow hunters have been largely non-existent. Overall, bow hunting on the Tower St. Conservation Area has successfully maintained traditional land use, promoted local food acquisition and provided a mechanism for control of urban deer populations. Expanding the Tower St. Conservation Area archery hunting area to include all portions of the Clark Fork Islands Nature Preserve downstream of the Milwaukee Line Trail should occur. Land managers should develop an appropriate “no-hunting” buffer adjacent to Milwaukee Line Trail. Periodic reviews of this archery hunting area by MT. FWP and the City will help minimize impacts of archery hunting on other users and natural resources on site.

4. ADDITIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE:

At multiple locations on the property, signage and/or physical barriers will be needed for public safety; to protect wildlife habitat; and to limit public trespass onto adjacent private property. Additionally, there are multiple opportunities to offer interpretative education onsite.

Fencing and Gates: To limit trespass into active industrial work sites much of the property boundary around the Wastewater plant and the City's poplar farm is already fenced. Before the Clark Fork Islands Property can be opened to the public, the chain-link fence around the City's Wastewater treatment plant should be extended around the Garden City Compost facility (Fig. 3). Exact location of this fence will be coordinated with the manager of Garden City Compost.

A large chain-link gate is already established in Koly Park at the Railroad bridge trailhead. Until new bridges are built to provide safe public access to the main Island (location of the birding loop trail) this gate should remain in place and public access from this location should be discouraged. As trail connections are established on the property it will be important to install appropriate signs and fencing to direct public access away from sensitive areas and to limit public trespass onto adjacent private property. Wooden rail fencing along the base of the old Milwaukee Railroad grade will provide a physical barrier, albeit a porous barrier, to direct recreationists onto areas with established trail systems (Fig 3). Any trail creation and/or unlawful camping in areas behind these fences should be discouraged.

At multiple times in the past, flood events have necessitated temporary closure of the Tower st. Conservation Area. In the future, it is feasible that during major flood events the City will need to close the Clark Fork Islands Nature preserve to the public. Final design and engineering of the Milwaukee Line Commuter trail will dictate whether closure gates at bridges on either side of the Clark Fork River will be necessary. Design of the Hiberta St. Trailhead, Birding loop access point, and the Garden City Ponds trail should consider future closure needs (Fig. 3).

Non-Trailhead Signage: At three locations, trails will effectively dead-end at private property boundaries. End-of-public access signs should be posted at the northern terminus of the Milwaukee line and at either end of the trail along the top of the Orchard Homes levee (Hiberta St. trailhead area) before any portions of the property are opened to the public (Fig. 3)

Several opportunities exist on the property for interpretative education. When the Milwaukee Commuter trail is complete an interpretive sign about the importance of the Clark Fork Island's riparian area for birds should be installed where the "birding loop trail" leaves the Commuter trail (Fig 3). At this location, it will also be important to appropriately post applicable rules for accessing the birding area. Additional interpretative signage should be considered

along the Garden City Ponds trail. While public use of land "owned" by a public utility isn't unusual how Missoula manages its wastewater and bio-solids is incredibly unique and innovative. Missoula's wastewater utility is using treated wastewater to grow poplar trees, greatly reducing nutrient loading into the Clark Fork River. Treated bio-solids from the wastewater plant and fiber from the poplar farm are used to make compost at the City-owned Garden City Compost facility. This innovative and environmentally responsible way to treat sewage has taken decades to develop. Establishing educational signage along the Garden City Ponds Trail (Fig. 3) will allow the public to learn about this uniquely Missoula-way of balancing the impacts of urbanization with environmental stewardship. Coordination between Missoula Wastewater utilities and Missoula Parks to develop this signage should occur.

Citations:

Carlson, C., M. Valliant, & C. Jandreau 2018; "Clouse/Kolendich Property Inventory" Missoula Parks and Recreation Conservation Lands Program Document; 100 Hickory St., Missoula, Mt., 59801. (406) 552-6263

Valliant, M., et. al.; "Missoula Conservation Lands Management Plan" City of Missoula Management plan;https://www.ci.missoula.mt.us/DocumentCenter/View/4499/Conservation-Lands-Management-Plan?bidId=

National Audubon Society, 2019; Important bird areas ID 282; https://www.audubon.org/important-bird areas/clark-fork-river-grass-valley