



Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project FERC Project No. 1869

Recreation Management Plan



Prepared by:
NorthWestern Energy
Butte, MT 59701

With Support From
Pinnacle Research
Plains, MT 59859

May 2024

[This page intentionally left blank.]

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	i
Executive Summary	iii
1.0 Introduction.....	1-1
1.1 Purpose of Plan.....	1-1
1.2 Regional Recreation in the Project Vicinity.....	1-1
2.0 Project Recreation Sites	2-1
2.1 Power Park	2-5
2.2 Island Park.....	2-7
2.3 Wild Goose Landing Park.....	2-8
2.4 South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area.....	2-10
2.5 Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site.....	2-12
3.0 Recreation Monitoring	3-1
4.0 Summary	4-1
5.0 Citations.....	5-1

List of Figures

Figure 1-1: Recreation areas within a 75-mile-radius of Thompson Falls.....	1-2
Figure 1-2: Recreation areas within a 10-mile-radius of Thompson Falls.....	1-3
Figure 1-3: Recreation sites in proximity to the Thompson Falls Project.....	1-5
Figure 2-1: Map of Project Recreation Sites.....	2-3
Figure 2-2: Power Park Project Recreation Site and Facilities.....	2-5
Figure 2-3: Island Park Project Recreation Site and Facilities.....	2-7
Figure 2-4: Wild Goose Landing Park Project Recreation Site and Facilities.....	2-9
Figure 2-5: South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area Project Recreation Site and Facilities.....	2-11
Figure 2-6: Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site Project Recreation Site and Facilities.....	2-12
Figure 3-1: Peak season daily visitor groups to monitored Project recreation sites, 2020-2022.....	3-3

List of Tables

Table 3-1: Peak season visitation estimates to Project recreation sites.....	3-2
--	-----

List of Photos

Photographs 2-1: Photos of Power Park.....	2-6
Photographs 2-2: Photos of Island Park.....	2-8

Photographs 2-3:	Photos of Wild Goose Landing Park.....	2-10
Photographs 2-4:	Photos of South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area.....	2-11
Photographs 2-5:	Photos of Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site.	2-12

]

[This page intentionally left blank.]

Executive Summary

NorthWestern Energy (NorthWestern) is the owner and operator of the Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project (FERC Project No. 1869) (Project), located on the Clark Fork River near Thompson Falls, Montana. A wide variety of recreation opportunities exist within the region of the Project and within the vicinity of the Project near the City of Thompson Falls, Montana.

Recent surveys of visitors to sites in proximity to the Project indicate that recreationists do not feel crowded and are highly satisfied with the opportunities and amenities offered. The majority of visitors that use these recreation sites are local-area residents. The volume of site visitation is quite stable, and patterns of use have been consistent over time.

Five recreation sites, Power Park, Island Park, Wild Goose Landing Park, the South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area, and the Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site are included as Project recreation sites in this Recreation Management Plan. NorthWestern will operate and maintain these five sites as Project recreation sites under its Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license for the Project.

Power Park and Wild Goose Landing Park are located adjacent to Thompson Falls Reservoir, above the Project's two dams (Main Channel Dam and Dry Channel Dam) and two powerhouses (original and new). Island Park is located between the two dams, adjacent to the fish passage facility on the right abutment of the Main Channel Dam. The South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area is located along the banks of the Clark Fork River, downstream of the Project's dams. Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site is located on the south shoreline approximately 4 miles upstream of the dams.

NorthWestern will manage and maintain:

- Power Park, as a neighborhood park with a group use pavilion, picnic facilities, and restrooms
- Island Park, as a pedestrian-access park in a natural setting with vault toilet restrooms, trails, and an overlook to the Project's fish passage facility
- Wild Goose Landing Park, as a water-access site with boat launching facilities, shoreline access for swimming, a restroom, and picnic facilities
- South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area, as dispersed Clark Fork River shoreline access
- Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site as a water-access site with boat launching facilities, a restroom, and picnic facilities.

[This page intentionally left blank.]

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

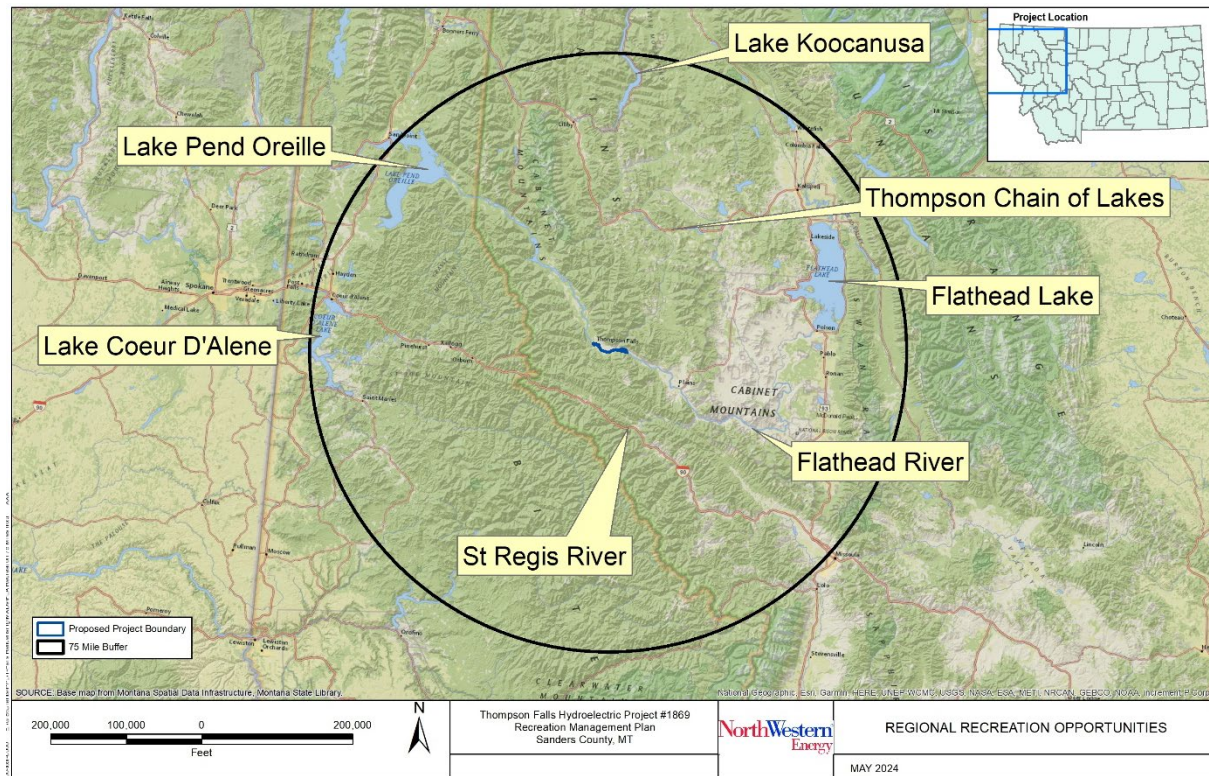
The purpose of this Thompson Falls Hydroelectric Project Recreation Management Plan (Plan) is to address management of Project recreation sites over the term of the new License. The Plan identifies and describes the sites, amenities, and measures that will be implemented to manage the recreation sites 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

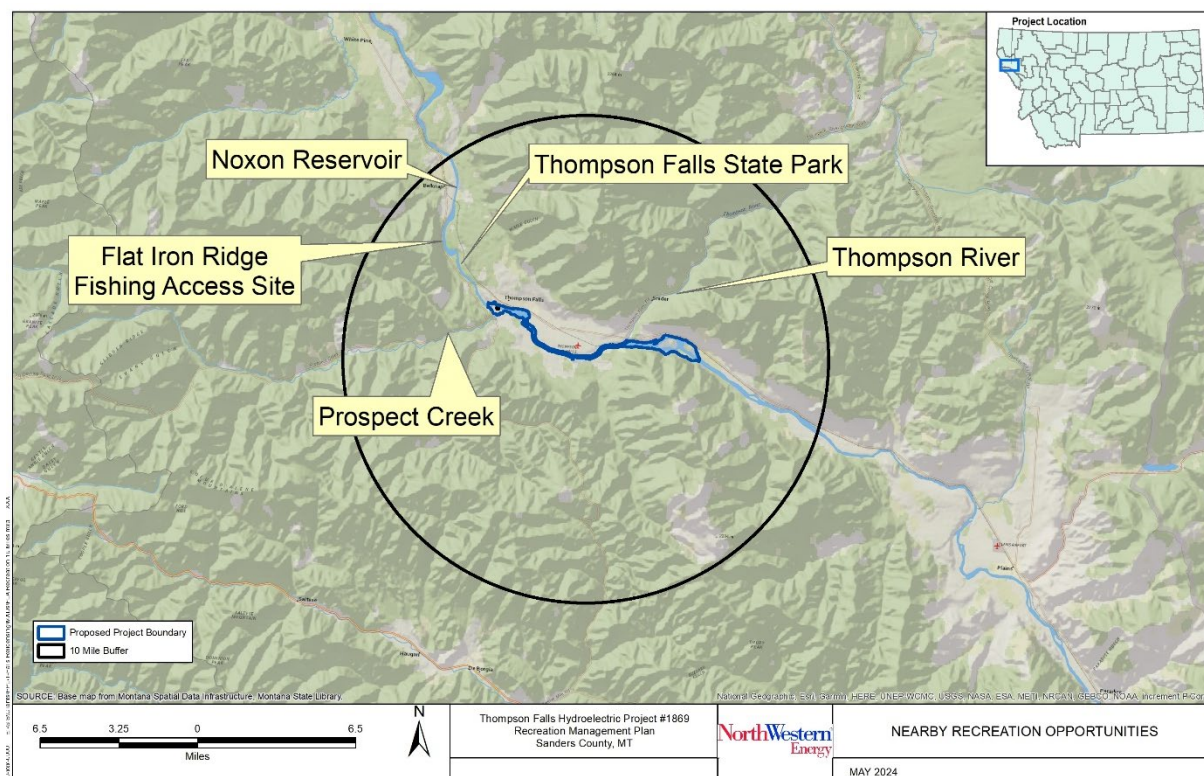
A wide variety of recreation opportunities exist within a 75-mile-radius of Thompson Falls, including hiking trails, camping areas, Forest Service lookouts, lakes, rivers, forest roads, and others. Sites and settings for recreation are managed by a mix of federal, state, tribal, and local agencies, as 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.



Nearer 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).

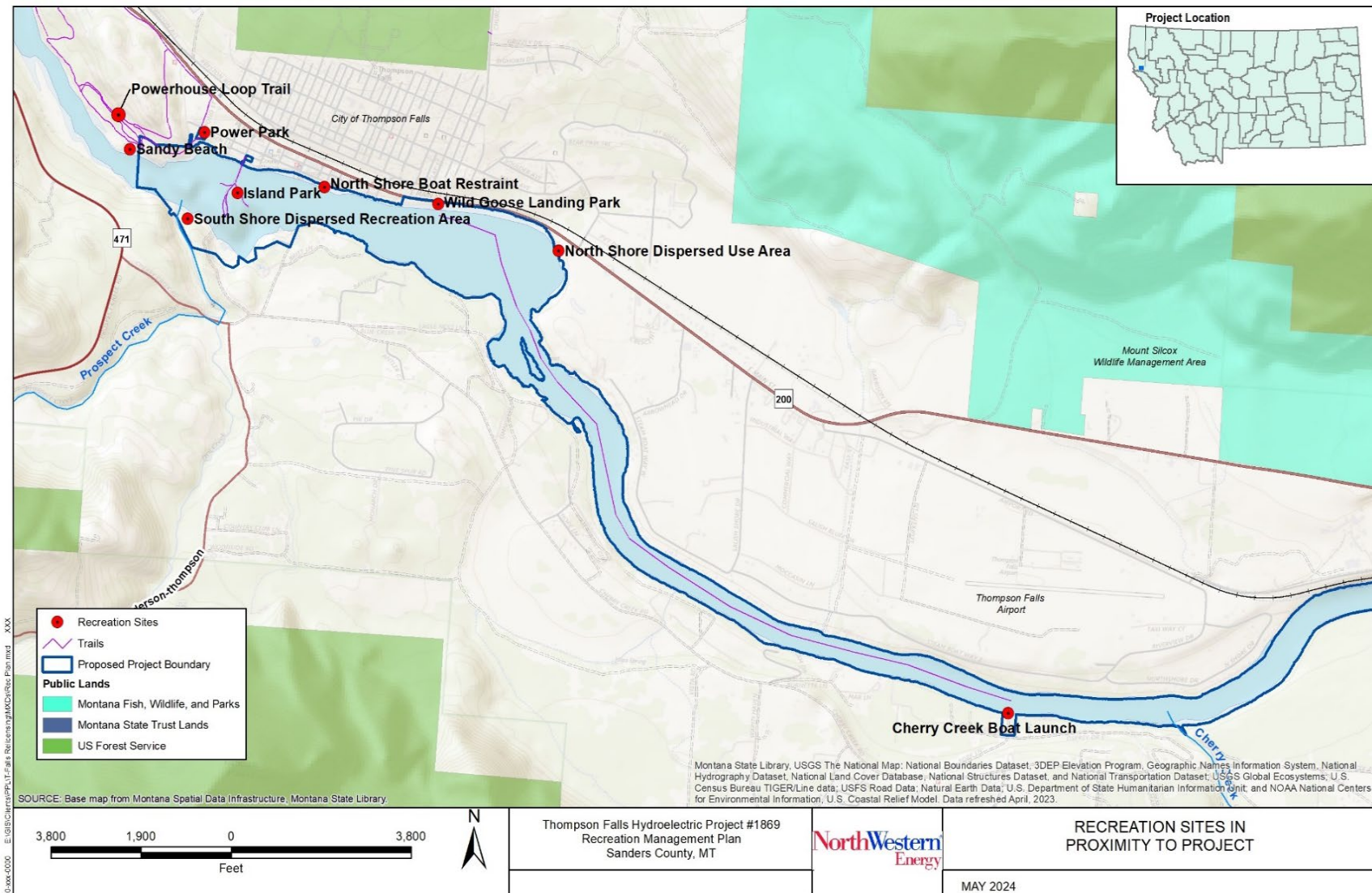
Figure 1-2: Recreation areas within a 10-mile-radius of Thompson Falls.



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**).

[This page intentionally left blank.]

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



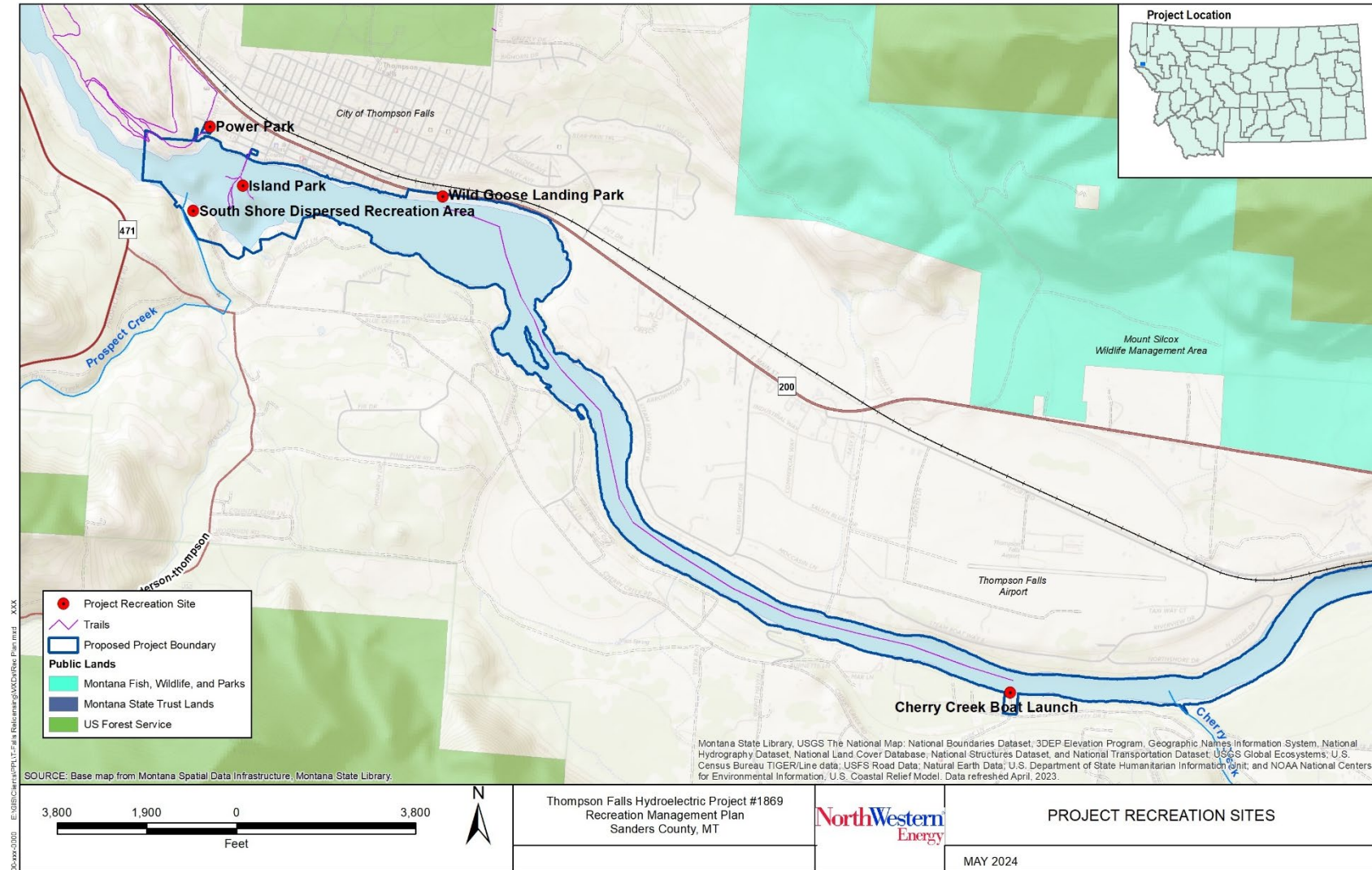
This page intentionally left blank.]

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.

[This page intentionally left blank.]

Figure 2-1: Map of Project Recreation Sites.



[This page intentionally left blank.]

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.



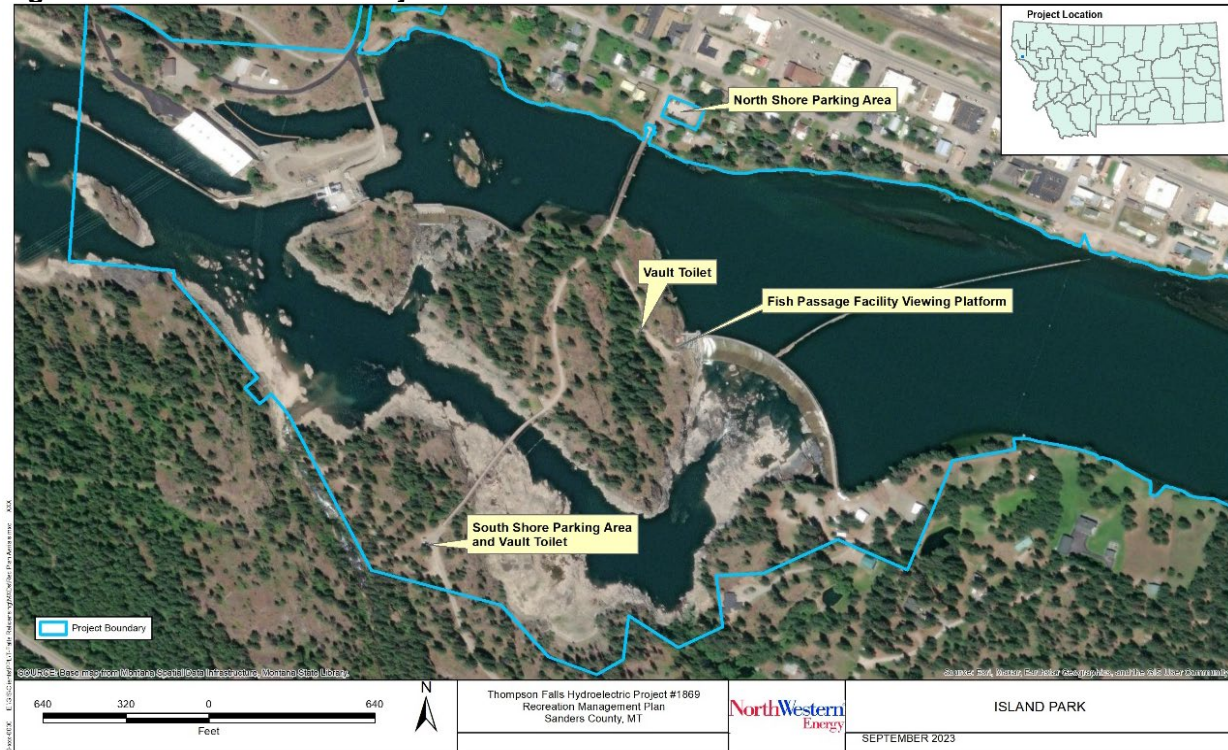


Photographs 2-1: Photos of Power Park

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.





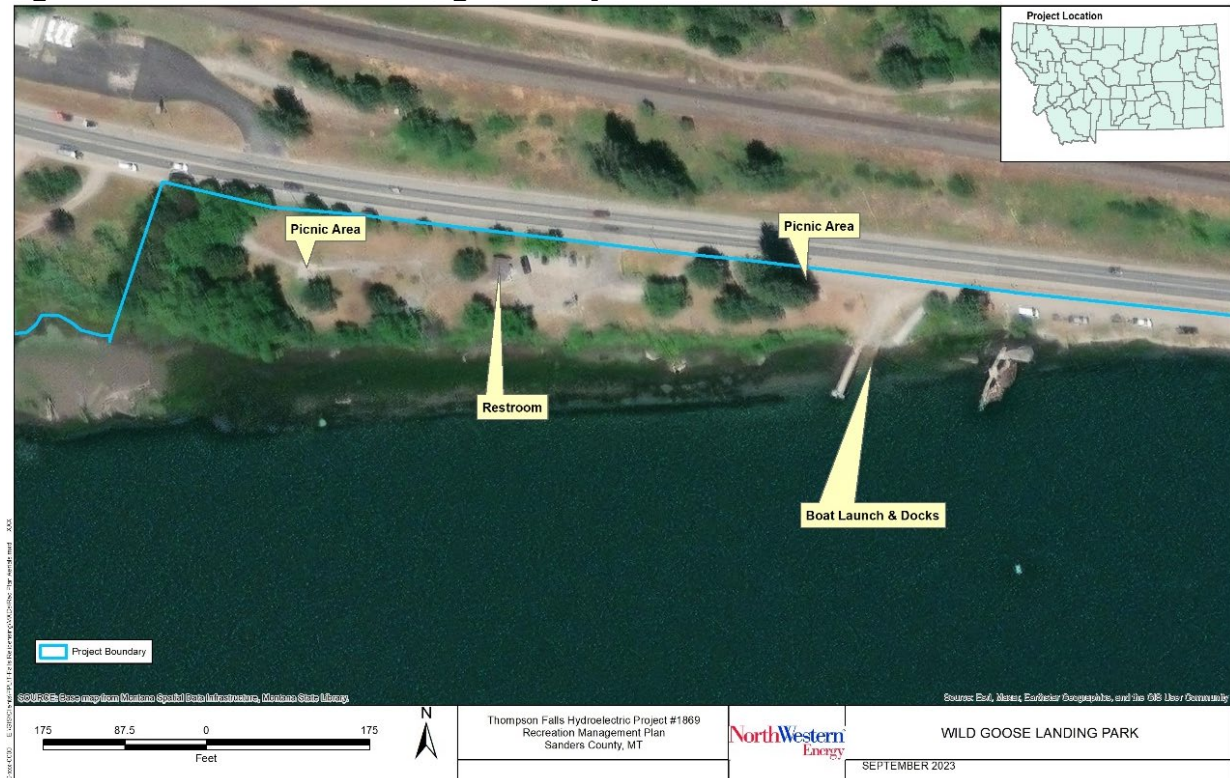
Photographs 2-2: Photos of Island Park.

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. Project amenities 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**). 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.



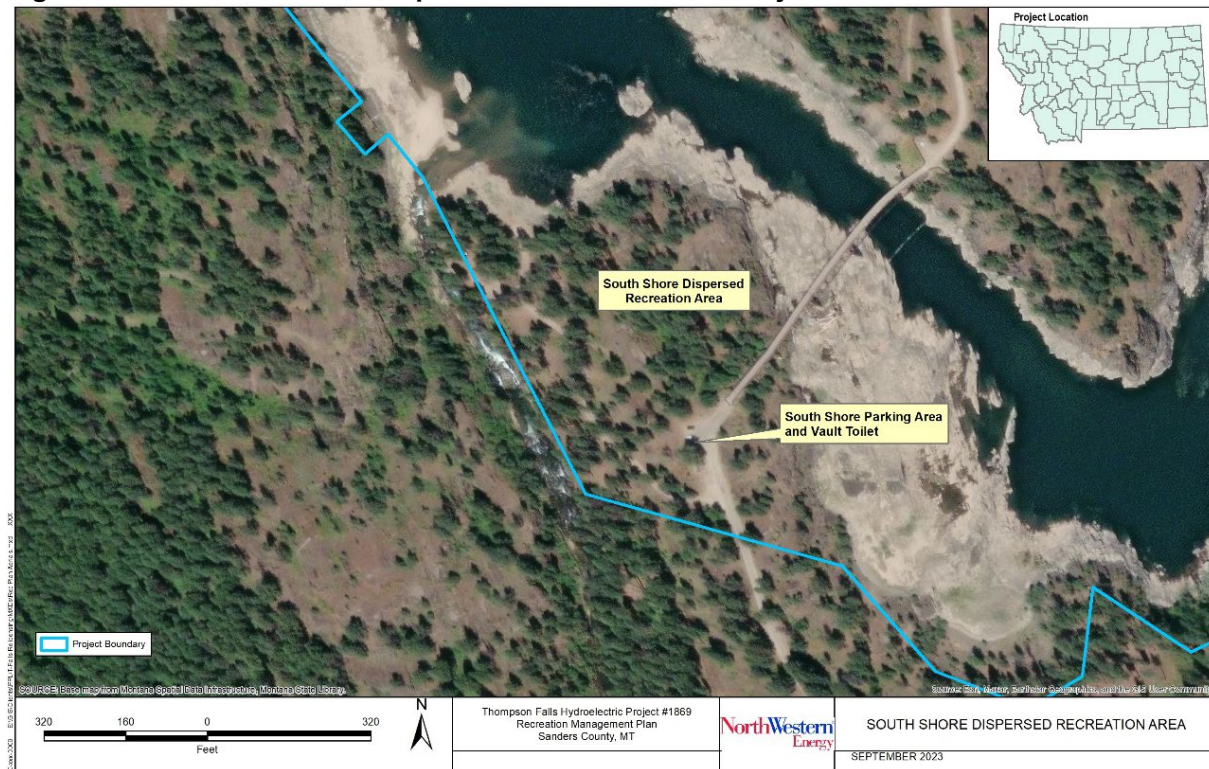


Photographs 2-3: Photos of Wild Goose Landing Park.

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 2-5**). 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 2-5: 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 2-6**). 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.

Figure 2-6: Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site Project Recreation Site and Facilities.



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

[This page intentionally left blank.]

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 crowdedness 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

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

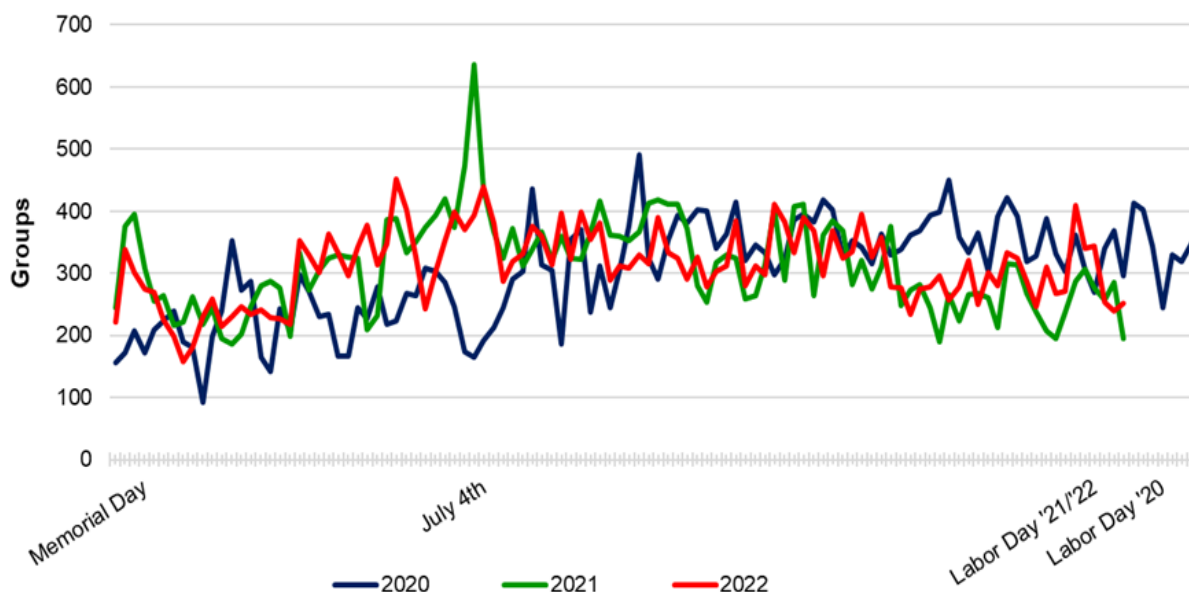
occurred at Island Park, 7 to 9 percent occurred at South Shore Dispersed Recreation Area, and 6 to 13 percent occurred at the Cherry Creek Boat Launch Site over the 3-year timeframe (**Table 3-1**).

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.

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. North Western 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 North Western'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.

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

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.

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 crowdedness have been documented through visitor surveys, along with visitor support for leaving sites as they are. 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.

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.

[This page intentionally left blank.]

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>

[This page intentionally left blank.]