

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
STATE OF MONTANA

STEVE BULLOCK  
GOVERNOR



MIKE COONEY  
LT. GOVERNOR

**MEMO**

**TO:** Martha Williams, Director, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks  
**FROM:** Steve Bullock, Governor *SCB*  
**DATE:** August 22, 2017  
**RE:** Developing a Parks In Focus Initiative

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Montanans value our public lands and the amazing outdoor recreational opportunities those lands provide. Montana's State Parks provide family recreational and educational experiences as well as public access to waters across the state. Our State Parks are one of the many ways we access public lands and a vibrant State Parks system is an important part of our heritage and our growing economy.

Despite the important role the State Parks system plays in providing over \$298 million in direct spending and supporting over 1,600 jobs annually, the fiscal health of the system remains a chronic problem amid rising costs for staffing, land and facility maintenance, and declining budgetary resources. In 2015, the Parks Division and the State Parks and Recreation Board developed a 5-year strategic plan focused on developing diversified revenue streams, growing strategic partnerships and building an engaged constituency. The work of the Parks and Recreation Board to date has shed light on the urgency of accelerating the implementation of that vision.

I want to ensure the Department has the resources, capacity and expertise to translate core visions from the 5-year strategic plan into an actionable agenda. The task at hand requires the focused effort of a larger group that complements the membership, capacity and expertise of the Parks and Recreation Board with additional leaders from across Montana. Through our shared efforts, we can identify solutions for the State Parks system that address core challenges head on, rather than seeking alternative administrative arrangements that both fail to confront fundamental issues of concern and lack capacity and resources to pursue emerging opportunities.

By way of this memorandum, I ask you to work with the new Board members to develop a Parks In Focus Initiative. Parks in Focus will leverage relevant expertise to conduct research, support transparent engagement and ultimately deliver and begin implementation of a set of recommendations that build from the Parks 2020 strategic vision. It is my expectation that all members of the Parks and Recreation Board will play an integral role in shaping and implementing the Parks in Focus Initiative, and that their regional perspectives will be bolstered by additional leaders serving for an approximately 18-month term as members of a Parks in Focus Commission. The additional leaders will lend diverse capacities to identify and implement solutions that ensure the Montana State Park system continues to evolve to best serve future needs and visitors and protect the park system's unique cultural, recreational, and historic

legacies. The Commission's task is to develop and begin implementation of the Parks in Focus Initiative. All Board members will also serve on the Commission and their charter and governance structure as the State Parks and Recreation Board will remain unchanged. Parks in Focus will deliver results and accountability to the Parks 2020 vision, while assuring the financial, operational, and cultural challenges facing our state parks are meaningfully addressed under the management of the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Moreover, for at least a decade and perhaps longer, the role and priority of the parks system within the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has often been raised. As part of that discussion, some have suggested separating the Parks division from the rest of the Department. In many respects, even the specter of such a separation has led to some acrimony and distrust among members of the Parks and Recreation Board, the State Parks Foundation, employees of the Department and other stakeholders. In your short tenure, you and many of our employees have made laudable progress overcoming this recent history of mistrust to work together toward the Department's core mission and values, demonstrating how a unified approach can best meet our needs for the future. As we move forward with the Parks in Focus Initiative, it is imperative that all partners, internal and external, turn the page and embrace a similar forward-looking vision that recognizes that the Department is serving Montanans' interests best when it operates cohesively and in unison to advance commonly-held goals.

Montanans are fortunate to have over 700 dedicated public servants working for FWP. I, and Montanans, expect that *all* of those public servants will be equally committed to the success of the Parks division, and that *all* will advance that success, both when called upon and through their everyday efforts in furthering an environment where every employee recognizes and affirms that this is *one* Department. The strength of our State Parks system ultimately contributes to enhancing our quality of life and our outdoor recreation economy and thus our commitment to a shared vision for the future of our Parks must be made by all Montanans who care about the resources under stewardship of the Department.

While I welcome early engagement from all relevant partners to shape the vision for this new initiative, I also wish to emphasize that I expect to be heavily engaged, along with staff from my office, in shaping its direction. Please report back to me with a collaborative vision for the Parks in Focus Initiative, an engagement strategy, a proposal for a public-private partnership to secure appropriate resources, and your recommendations for nominees to serve on the Parks In Focus Commission alongside Board members within 45 days.

CC:

Angie Grove, District 1 Representative, State Parks and Recreation Board, Chair  
Jeff Welch, District 2 Representative, State Parks and Recreation Board  
Mary Moe, District 3 Representative, State Parks and Recreation Board  
Betty Stone, District 4 Representative, State Parks and Recreation Board  
Scott Brown, District 5 Representative, State Parks and Recreation Board  
Tom Reilly, Acting Parks Division Administrator, Fish, Wildlife and Parks