

From: Montana FWP - Region 5 <montanafwp@announcements.mt.gov>
Sent: Thursday, August 31, 2023 2:11 PM
To: Ravalli County Commissioners Office
Subject: [EXTERNAL] FWP receives grant for pre-preservation work at Pictograph Cave State Park



FWP NEWS RELEASE

Region 5 Headquarters

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THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

FWP receives grant for pre-preservation work at Pictograph Cave State Park

Work will ensure site preservation and visitor safety

BILLINGS - Pictograph Cave State Park in Yellowstone County near Billings was recently awarded a \$75,000 Semiquincentennial Grant from the Historic Preservation Fund administered by the National Park Service. The Semiquincentennial Grant Program was created in 2020 to honor the 250th anniversary of the United States by restoring and preserving sites that commemorate the founding of the nation.

Pictograph Cave State Park is a designated National Historic Landmark because of its archeological significance. The park includes three natural sandstone caves considered some of the most important archeological sites in the Northern Plains and numerous pictographs, or rock paintings, dating back over 2,000 years. The artifacts and pictographs at the park are a unique record of the lifeways of Native people on the Northern Plains that show how they lived before, during and after the West was incorporated into the United States. Modern tribes with connections to Pictograph Cave include the Blackfoot Nation, the Crow Tribe, the Fort Belknap Indian Community, the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes, the Northern Cheyenne Tribe and the Shoshone Tribe of the Wind River Reservation.

Today, Pictograph Cave State Park is a popular park located just outside of Montana's largest city that offers trails to the caves and a visitors center with interpretive information. However, the integrity of the site has been compromised by archaeological investigations, natural weathering of the soft sandstone, rockfall and destruction of natural springs. In January 2021, a rockfall occurred at the entrance to Pictograph Cave State Park that involved the failure

of a large section of rimrock above the access road to the park. Boulders and debris were deposited 450 to 500 feet downhill, onto the park's road and walking paths. A previous rockfall occurred in 2014 directly above the viewing platform at the entrance to Pictograph Cave. Thankfully, no visitors were harmed during either rockfall.

In addition, the pictographs have begun to spall off the cave wall due to soil loss from historic archaeological excavations. Vandalism, previous efforts at graffiti removal, natural erosion and weathering also endanger the pictographs.

Previous studies at the park summarized the safety and preservation issues and outlined recommendations for future work. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will use the grant funding to hire a geotechnical engineering specialist to conduct pre-preservation work, review previous reports, assess current conditions of the site's sandstone walls and rock shelters, and create a site plan, which will include construction documents for future work and a rockfall mitigation strategy. Once the geotechnical analysis and site plan are complete, FWP will seek additional funding from the Semiquincentennial Grant Program and elsewhere to implement the plan and rockfall mitigation strategy. The Semiquincentennial Grant funding will allow FWP to pursue this vital pre-preservation work and protect this important site for future generations.

For more information about the project, contact Brenna Moloney, FWP Heritage Specialist, at Brenna.moloney@mt.gov.

For more information on the Semiquincentennial Grant Program and other grant recipients, visit: nps.gov/orgs/1207/semiquincentennial-grants-07-13-23.htm.

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