

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 25, 2019

Agenda Item: Robb-Ledford Wildlife Management Area Grazing Lease Renewal

Division: Wildlife **Action Needed:** Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

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Background

A nine-year grazing lease renewal is proposed with the Ledford Creek Grazing Association (LCGA) on Robb-Ledford Wildlife Management Area (RLWMA). The lease involves cooperatively grazing up to 2,955 cattle (animal unit months (AUMs) annually on 32,368 acres known as the the Robb-Ledford Coordinated Grazing System. The system includes 17,302 acres of FWP deeded, 10,786 acres of Department of Natural Resource Conservation (DNRC) leased by FWP, 3,600 acres of DNRC leased by the LCGA, and 680 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) leased by the LCGA. The grazing rotation also includes adjacent BLM and United States Forest Service allotments leased by the LCGA. Since 2000, FWP has used formal grazing leases with the LCGA to help meet the following management plan objectives: 1) maintenance or improvement of basic resources including vegetation, soil, and water; 2) demonstrate compatible management for consideration on other lands; 3) showcase the WMA as an area where wildlife and livestock can co-exist while maintaining a healthy rangeland; 4) provide winter forage for elk; 5) provide habitat for all wildlife using the WMA; 6) enhance wildlife habitats on the WMA and adjacent lands by managing the area as a common landscape; 7) provide adequate public access; 8) maintain the natural character of the land; and 9) increase public awareness and appreciation for the diversity of wildlife on the WMA.

Public Involvement Process & Results

A draft environmental assessment was completed and was released for public review and comment on Feb. 21, 2019. Public comment was accepted until 5 pm on March 22, 2019. No public comments were received.

Alternatives and Analysis

Alternative A—No Grazing would allow the lease to expire, and no livestock grazing would be permitted on the RLWMA. *Alternative B—Renew the Existing Grazing Lease with No Changes* would continue the current grazing system lease with LCGA. Grazing would occur annually, following a rest-rotation design during June 22–Oct. 15. A maximum of 2,955 AUMs would be allowed annually. The LCGA would assume all fence and waterline maintenance responsibilities in exchange for paying one-half of the standard FWP grazing rate. *Alternative C (Preferred Alternative)—Renew the Existing Grazing Lease with Two Adjustments* would continue the current grazing system lease with two adjustments: 1) during every third year, when cattle start the annual grazing rotation in the Dry Hollow Pasture, change the prescription from: livestock graze the entire pasture during June 22–July 6, to livestock graze the lower elevation portion of the pasture during June 22–July 6 and graze the entire pasture during July 6–July 15; and 2) adjust the southwest corner of the Rock/Swamp Pasture and develop a water-gap to allow cattle to obtain water from the East Fork of Blacktail Deer Creek.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Approve the nine-year lease as described under the Preferred Alternative. This would maintain those portions of the grazing system that have functioned well and further address riparian health concerns within the Rock Creek Watershed. Continuing with this lease would also help maintain cooperative relationships that have wildlife and habitat management implications that extend beyond the boundaries of the RLWMA.

Proposed Motion

I move the commission approve renewal of the grazing lease on RLWMA with the adjustments described within the Preferred Alternative.