

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 25, 2019

Agenda Item: Fleecer WMA Grazing Leases Renewal

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background

FWP proposes to continue a coordinated grazing program on Fleecer WMA near Divide for a four-year term to extend May 2019 - October 2022. The program began in 1986 and has been modified over the years to better suit habitat objectives. It consists of a spring grazing exchange agreement (up to 500 animal unit months) with Fleecer Cattle Co. (formerly Smith 6 Bar S Livestock) and a separate fall fee-grazing agreement (94 AUMs) with Fleecer Cattle Co. and Russel Dupuis. Spring grazing would occur every other year as intensive grazing in a WMA pasture dominated by smooth brome. Fall grazing would occur in a rest-rotation fashion on the remaining three pastures on Fleecer WMA. Fleecer Cattle Co. would rest one pasture annually, dedicating forage for wintering elk, in exchange for spring grazing on the WMA. The grazing program would involve 3,700 acres of FWP land, 875 acres of Montana DNRC land leased by FWP, 1,920 acres of Fleecer Cattle Co. land, and 640 acres of DNRC land leased by Fleecer Cattle Co. In addition, the system dovetails with the adjacent Forest Service grazing system of 6,080 acres. Total acreage involved would be 13,215 acres.

Public Involvement Process & Results

An Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed and open for public comment from Dec 28, 2018, to Jan 28, 2019. The EA was posted on the FWP website and mailed to a standard list of interested persons and a local list of interested parties. In addition, a statewide press release was issued and legal notices were posted in the *Butte Montana Standard*, the *Anaconda Leader*, and the *Dillon Tribune*. Four parties submitted comments: three stated or implied support for Alternative A; one implied support for Alternative C. A Decision Notice was issued by FWP Region 3 Supervisor on Feb 15, 2019.

Alternatives and Analysis

The following alternatives were considered in this Environmental Assessment:

Alternative A: Renewal of both the spring and fall grazing leases on Fleecer WMA.

Alternative B: Renewal of only the spring or only the fall grazing lease on Fleecer WMA.

Alternative C: Elimination of livestock grazing on the Fleecer WMA.

Alternative A uses cattle as a management tool for maintaining high quality and abundant forage for elk and other wildlife across land ownerships. Under Alternative B or C, elk and other wildlife may be negatively impacted in the long term due to the reduction in quality forage on the WMA, inadequate grazing rest on private and federal land pastures, and reduced tolerance for elk use on private land.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the commission approve the Fleecer WMA Grazing Lease Renewal. This project will enhance and maintain habitat conditions across big game winter range on the WMA and adjacent private and DNRC lands, for the benefit of wildlife and the public.

Proposed Motion

I move the commission approve renewal of the Fleecer WMA grazing leases as presented by FWP.