



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: August 15, 2019

Agenda Item: Lost Trail CE, R1

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: FWP is working with The Trust for Public Land (TPL) and Weyerhaeuser Company on a proposed conservation easement (CE) involving 7,274 acres of highly productive timberland in northwest Montana (Fig. 1). The project lands run along the southern border of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). The proposed CE would allow Weyerhaeuser to continue sustainable forest management; preclude development; sustain wood-product jobs; protect valuable wildlife habitat, a key elk migratory corridor; and provide permanent, year-round public access to popular recreation lands. It would also protect valuable landscape connectivity identified in the Western Governors' Association Critical Habitat Assessment Tool. This project would protect the north slope of Dredger Ridge, a favorite walk-in elk hunting area. The property also supports grizzly bear and Canada lynx. The US Forest Service Forest Legacy Program and Habitat Montana would be likely funding sources if this proposal were to proceed to completion. Success of this proposal may lead to conservation of an additional 55,000 acres adjoining the proposed CE and surrounding Lost Trail NWR, possibly using USFWS conservation programs.

Public Involvement Process & Results: TPL and Weyerhaeuser met with the Flathead County Commissioners to apprise them of this potential project and received their unanimous support. The proposal also has support from the Montana congressional delegation, federal agencies, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and many conservation groups. No formal public involvement has yet occurred. If the commission endorses moving forward with this project, FWP would conduct appropriate due diligence, analysis, and public review processes.

Alternatives and Analysis: Proposal alternatives and analysis would be developed by FWP (upon endorsement by the commission) and released in a draft EA for public review/comment opportunity.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the commission endorse this proposed project to allow the department to continue working with TPL and Weyerhaeuser on this proposal to conserve valuable wildlife habitat and public recreational opportunities.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission endorse the proposal to further negotiate the Lost Trail Conservation Easement and complete associated analysis.