

WILDLIFE HABITAT LAND PROJECT PROPOSAL

Stumptown Addition to the Garry Mountain Wildlife Management Area



1. **Region:** 2

Regional Supervisor: Randy Arnold

Name of Applicant(s): Torrey Ritter, Julie Golla, Mike Mueller, Martin Balukas

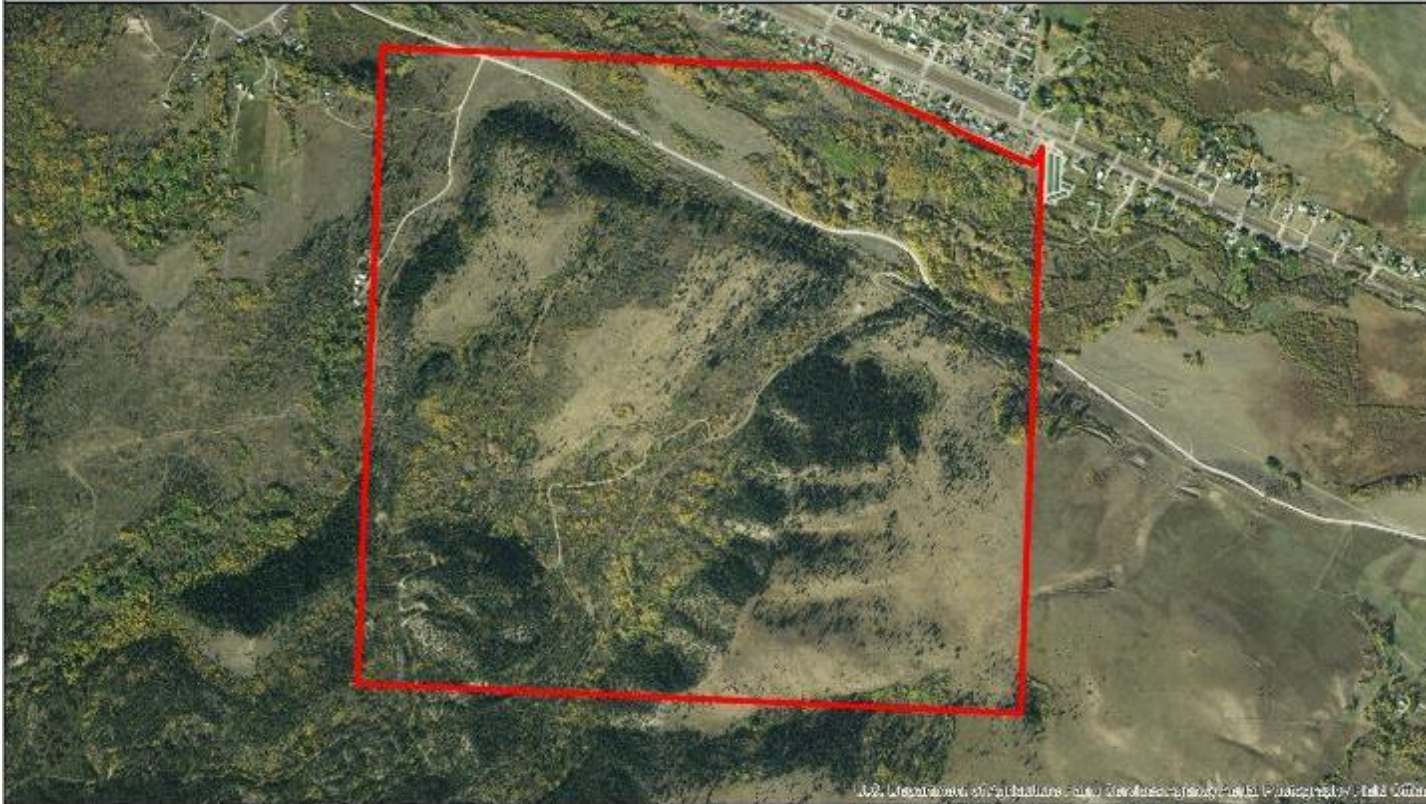
2. **Date:** 06/04/2019

3. **Project Name:** Stumptown Addition to Garry Mountain Wildlife Management Area (Fee Title Acquisition)

4. **Size:** 620 acres

5. **Location:** Approximately 1.5 miles west of Anaconda along Stumptown Road in Deer Lodge County, FWP Region 2.

6. **Map(s):** See figures 1, 2, and 3 for project location, landscape context, and surrounding land ownerships.



 Stumptown Addition

U.S. Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service



Map Produced by: Region 2 Wildlife
3/12/2019



0 0.125 0.25
Miles

Figure 1. 2015 aerial image of the proposed Stumptown addition to the Garry Mountain Wildlife Management Area in the Clark Fork River drainage of western Montana (FWP Region 2). Gold-colored vegetation north of the road is riparian vegetation along Warm Springs Creek. South of the road the gold-colored vegetation is aspen stands.

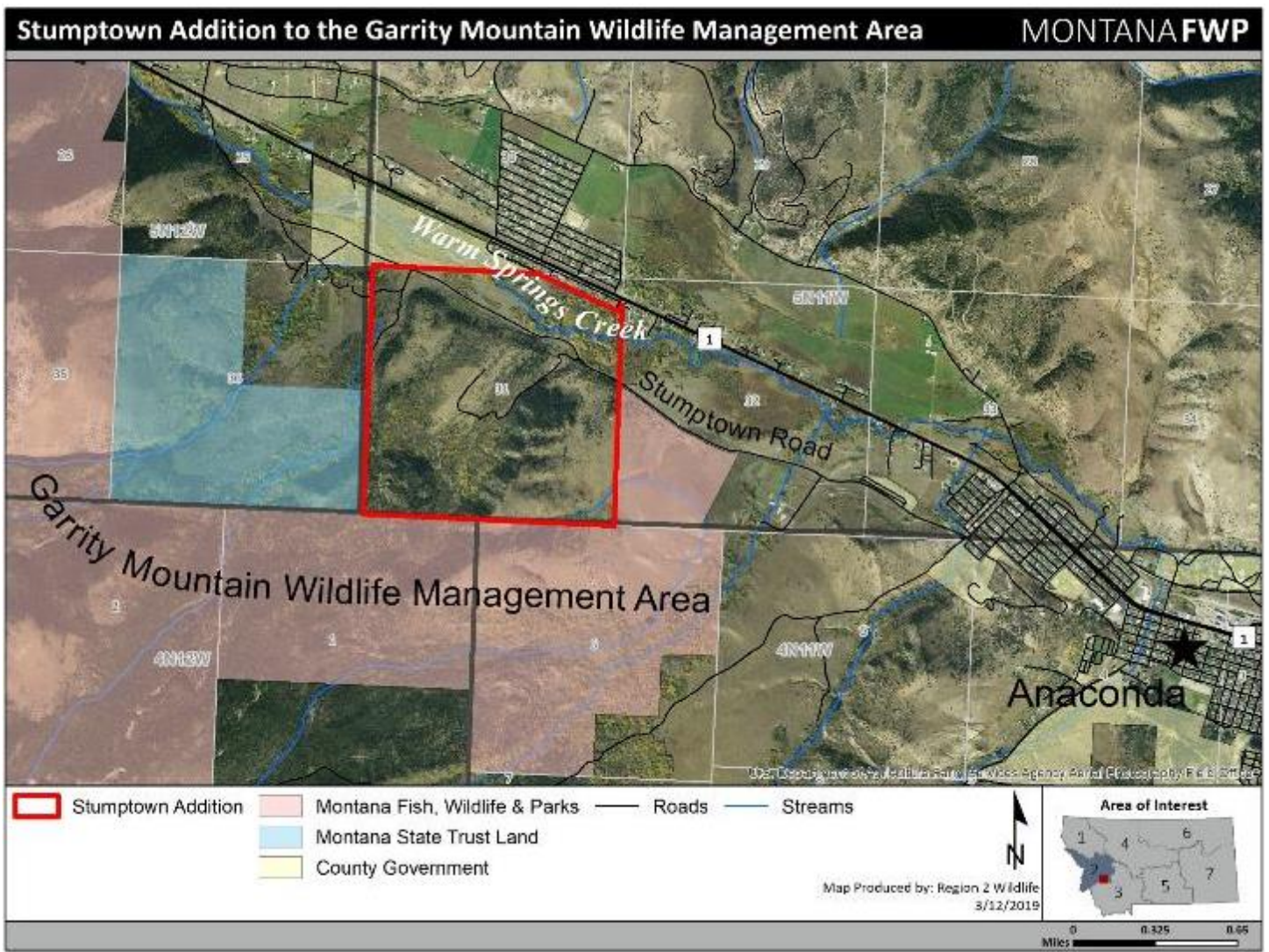


Figure 2. Area map for the proposed Stumptown addition to the Garry Mountain Wildlife Management Area in the Clark Fork River drainage of western Montana (FWP Region 2). All properties that are not colored represent private lands.

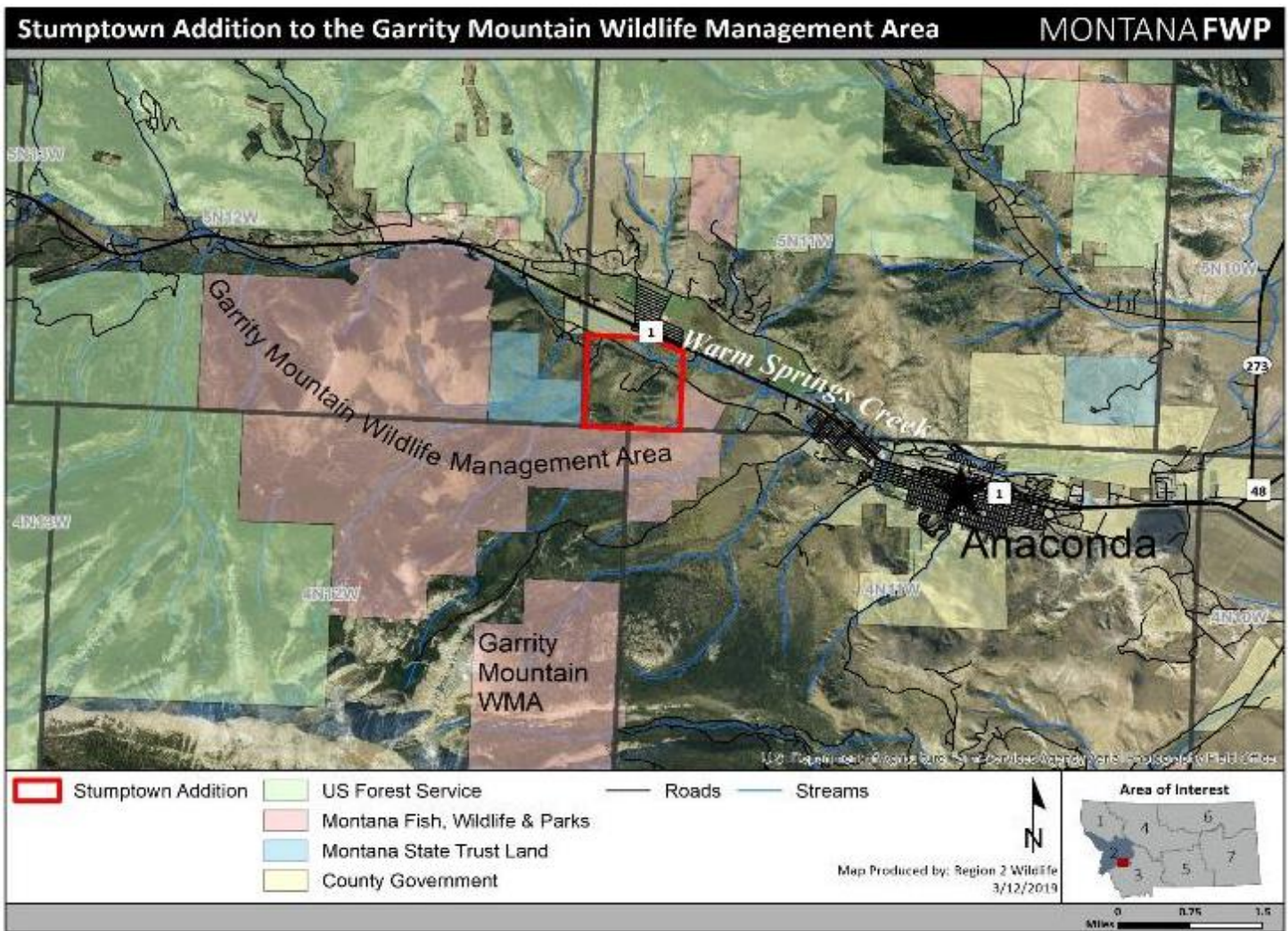


Figure 3. Landscape context and surrounding land ownership for the proposed Stumptown addition to the Garry Mountain Wildlife Management Area in the Clark Fork River drainage of western Montana (FWP Region 2). All properties that are not colored represent private lands.

7. Project Need

The proposed Stumptown addition to the Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area (GMWMA) would:

- 1) Protect critical fish and wildlife habitat for both game and nongame species.
- 2) Add significantly to a landscape-scale block of conservation lands with great public access.
- 3) Enhance outdoor recreation opportunities in Anaconda and surrounding communities.

The Stumptown Addition consists of approximately 620 acres of diverse habitats including aspen stands and riparian areas that are some of the most biologically rich and imminently threatened habitats in Montana. Warm Springs Creek flows through the property and supports a robust riparian zone with quality habitat for threatened bull trout and many Species of Concern including Westslope cutthroat trout, western toads, and great blue herons. The uplands have a mix of forest types and grasslands that provide cover and feeding opportunities in close proximity for ungulates and other wildlife. Flat, lowland areas are scarce for game animals on the GMWMA. As such, this addition would provide a critical linkage between high and low elevation habitats on the larger landscape. The addition and the surrounding landscape are important for fish and wildlife habitat and connectivity in Region 2, and the State Wildlife Action Plan recognizes the area as a priority for conservation actions.

The Stumptown property would add to the 6,707-acre GMWMA that is in turn connected to a large landscape of U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and FWP lands in the Beaverhead-Deer Lodge National Forest and the Mt. Haggin WMA. The addition would enhance access to the GMWMA in an area that is generally steep and rugged and therefore difficult to access by the general public. The addition would also enhance fishing access along Warm Springs Creek, where trout are abundant. Wildlife watchers and hunters would enjoy the network of trails and old roads that course through a diverse mix of habitat types. While access opportunities are abundant on the property, large portions remain wild and relatively unimpacted, providing security and other necessary resources for a variety of species throughout their life cycles.

8. Broad Terrestrial and Aquatic Habitat Criteria

The Stumptown addition is comprised almost entirely of Tier 1 Community Types (Level 2 Landcover):

- 258 acres (42%) of Montane Grassland
- 164 acres (26%) of Conifer-dominated Forest and Woodland (Xeric-mesic)

- 72 acres (12%) of Floodplain and Riparian
- 45 acres (7%) of Sagebrush-steppe
- 23 acres (4%) of Deciduous-dominated Forest and Woodland
- 10 acres (2%) are a mix of Shrublands, Open Water, and Wet Meadows

The only non-Tier 1 Community Types are 25 acres (4%) of Developed and 23 acres (4%) of Insect-killed Forest. However, on-the-ground observations indicate the Developed acreage is significantly less than shown by Landcover data. Approximately 0.7 miles of Warm Springs Creek, a large perennial stream, flows through the property. Warm Springs Creek has complex, multi-threaded stream channels and is surrounded by a lush riparian area consisting of willows, alders, junipers, and cottonwoods. An additional 0.4 miles of intermittent streams flow seasonally in the higher elevations on the property. There would be no tillage cropland included in this fee-title acquisition.

9. Project Level Criteria

a) Site-specific Habitat Values

The proposed Stumptown addition would protect a diversity of habitat types while contributing to landscape-scale habitat conservation. The addition supports wintering elk, mule deer, and moose and connects low elevation habitats to steeper, forested habitats on the GMWMA and surrounding USFS lands. The addition is particularly valuable for nongame wildlife habitat as it provides ecological niches for a wide range of plant and animal species. The uplands are a mix of conifer forests, aspen stands, and grassland meadows where animals can find a range of resources in a relatively small area. Birds in particular can find good nesting and foraging resources among the habitats in the proposed addition. Warm Springs Creek and the associated riparian area support high biodiversity in both the aquatic and terrestrial realms. The riparian area on the proposed addition is wide and robust relative to the rest of the stream. Protecting this property would allow the stream to move in its floodplain just downstream of a constricted stretch of the channel, potentially reducing flooding hazards downstream while protecting the critical ecological link between the stream channel and the floodplain. Almost the entire property consists of Tier I Community Types as identified by the SWAP and the land lies within Tier I and II Focal Areas for Aquatic and Terrestrial species, respectively. A long list of Species of Concern and Potential Species of Concern benefit from the habitats on this property (Table 1).

b) Threat Status: IMMINENT

The proposed Stumptown addition is located within 2 miles of the small town of Anaconda and within 30 miles of the city of Butte. The property overlooks the scenic Clark Fork River valley and is relatively flat with good access via Highway 1. The area around the property offers almost all the major types of

outdoor recreation in Montana in close proximity making it a highly desirable place for people to want to live. The current landowner has already subdivided a small portion of the property and lots are currently for sale. Large portions of the rest of the property would make ideal home sites surrounded by public lands and within range of abundant recreation opportunities and a growing community.

c) Focal Priority

The proposed addition lies within the Warm Springs Creek Tier I Aquatic Focal Area and within the Georgetown Lake - Phillipsburg Tier II Terrestrial Focal Area as identified by the SWAP. The property is considered top priority for “Species of Economic and Recreational Importance” and “Habitat for Species of Concern” within the FWP Crucial Areas Planning System (CAPS) because of the large amount of aspen and riparian habitats as well high values for big game winter range. The property provides winter range for elk, moose, mule deer, and whitetail deer and is considered high value habitat for bighorn sheep. The addition contributes to landscape connectivity as it provides linkage between low elevation grasslands and riparian areas and high elevation forests and meadows on the GMWMA and USFS lands. The property also lies along a migration corridor for animals moving between the upper Deer Lodge Valley, Georgetown Lake, and the Flint Creek Valley.

FWP, the Montana Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP), the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, and Five Valleys Land Trust have been working on extensive conservation and rehabilitation efforts in the upper Clark Fork River Basin to repair, enhance, and maintain fish and wildlife habitat in areas damaged by historic mining activities. These efforts include purchase and maintenance of the GMWMA, to which the proposed property would be added. The GMWMA was purchased in 2001 under a partnership between the NRDP and FWP primarily to provide summer and winter habitat for elk, mule deer, and a herd of bighorn sheep. For this project, we are partnering with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) and NRDP. We have conducted initial outreach efforts to local sportspersons organizations and the project has so far received enthusiastic support.

d) Geographic Effectiveness

The Stumptown addition is a single block of land connected to the GMWMA on two sides. Overall, the Stumptown property would be a valuable addition to a large block of public conservation lands in the upper Clark Fork River valley. The addition would add significantly to the GMWMA and would block up a portion of the WMA that is currently somewhat isolated. The GMWMA stretches from Highway 1 along Warm Springs Creek to elevations over 9,000 feet and is connected to a massive expanse of public lands in the Beaverhead-Deer Lodge National Forest and the Mt. Haggin WMA (Figure 3).

The property is composed of a single parcel owned by a single landowner. The landowner would prefer the property go into public ownership and is willing to work with FWP and its partners to accommodate our timelines.

e) **Contribute to hunting and fishing opportunity and other recreation**

The Stumptown addition would provide abundant hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife-watching, camping, and picnicking opportunities. The addition would greatly increase access to portions of the GMWMA that are relatively inaccessible to the general public due to rugged terrain. Hunters would have opportunities for elk, mule deer, whitetail deer, moose, dusky and ruffed grouse, and a variety of furbearers. Trout are abundant in Warm Springs Creek and there are few public fishing areas along the creek that are easily accessible for fishers.

There is easy access to the property via a public road (Stumptown Road) that bisects the proposed addition through the lower elevations. Stumptown Road is a public road and would remain open year-round. The boundary of the proposed addition is just 1.5 miles from the town of Anaconda off of Highway 1. The property is also only 12 miles from Interstate 90 so the potential for substantial public use is high. The property would be incorporated into and managed as part of the GMWMA under the WMA Habitat Plan (in production). Therefore, the addition would likely be closed to public access from December 1st to May 31st annually. However, there may be special regulations for the floodplain area to accommodate early spring use by anglers. There are a variety of trails and old roads that run through the property, while large portions remain more difficult to access. This arrangement provides good access for users while also providing security for fish and wildlife species that use the area.

f) **Management Considerations**

The property would not require substantial monitoring needs because it would be incorporated into an existing WMA. Increased use would occur on the property that would require additional enforcement presence and WMA maintenance time on fence and road repairs as well as weed management. The GMWMA does not allow grazing and the proposed addition would not be large enough to garner interest in grazing all or portions of the WMA. A timber management plan may be needed for GMWMA as a whole, but this addition would not add a substantial burden to that effort. There are a few small cabins on the lower elevations on the property that could remain in place and be used for administrative purposes or could be relatively easily removed. There is one old barn on the property that would likely be left in place to serve as nongame wildlife habitat and as a heritage site. There is also a small shop located in the upland portion of the property that would need to be removed.

Currently, a small portion of the property has been subdivided and lots are now for sale. FWP has worked with the landowner and decided it would be best for the landowner to sell three parcels that are west of a county road in the northwest corner of the property (road visible in Figure 1). This sale would allow the landowner to glean a little more value from his property and would also remove a potentially complex future management issue by making the road a clear boundary of the WMA. The landowner has expressed a desire to sell the remaining portion of the property all at once and preferably to public ownership. A public road bisects the lower portions of the property and provides access to permanent residences along the Stumptown Road. An access plan would need to be developed to accommodate this open road during portions of the year when the WMA may be closed. There is a permanent residence on the border of the property on the northwest side that may experience increased trespass issues if this land were added to the WMA. FWP Region 2 staff would work with this landowner before purchasing the property to address their concerns.

Table 1. List of Species of Concern and Potential Species of Concern that would be supported by habitats within the proposed Stumptown addition to the Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area.

Species	Type	MT Status	Confirmed	Suspected	Possible
Bull Trout	Fish	S2	X		
Westslope Cutthroat Trout	Fish	S2	X		
Lewis's Woodpecker	Bird	S2		X	
Black-crowned Rosy Finch	Bird	S2		X	
Gray-crowned Rosy Finch	Bird	S2		X	
Western Toad	Amphibian	S2		X	
Dwarf Shrew	Mammal	S2			X
Clark's Nutcracker	Bird	S3	X		
Evening Grosbeak	Bird	S3	X		
Cassin's Finch	Bird	S3	X		
Brown Creeper	Bird	S3	X		
Pileated Woodpecker	Bird	S3	X		
Pacific Wren	Bird	S3	X		
Veery	Bird	S3	X		
Great Blue Heron	Bird	S3	X		
Bald Eagle	Bird	S3	X		
Northern Goshawk	Bird	S3		X	
Golden Eagle	Bird	S3		X	
Loggerhead Shrike	Bird	S3		X	
Western Screech-owl	Bird	S3		X	
Northern Hawk Owl	Bird	S3		X	
Little Brown Myotis	Mammal	S3		X	
Green-tailed Towhee	Bird	S3			X
Wolverine	Mammal	S3			X
Fisher	Mammal	S3			X
Preble's Shrew	Mammal	S3			X
Townsend's Big-eared Bat	Mammal	S3			X
Yuma Myotis	Mammal	S3			X
Fringed Myotis	Mammal	S3			X

Appendix A. Representative photos of the proposed Stumptown addition to the Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area.





Photo 1. View of the proposed Stumptown Addition from a ridge on the eastern portion of the property looking west up the Anaconda Valley. Trees that appear gray in the photo are aspens. The Warm Springs Creek floodplain area can be seen on the far-right side of the photo.



Photo 2. The Stumptown Road is a public road that is open year-round and bisects the property on the north side. To the right (North) is the Warm Springs Creek floodplain and to the left (South) is the upland acreage. This road connects directly to the town of Anaconda and also connects to Highway 1 west of town.



Photo 3. Warm Springs Creek flows for 0.7 miles through the lower portions of the property and provides habitat for Westslope cutthroat trout (Species of Concern) and bull trout (federally threatened). There are abundant logs jams, backwaters, and side channels indicating an active floodplain that maintains the rich and diverse riparian area.



Photo 4. There is easy access to most of Warm Springs Creek as it flows through the proposed addition and the abundance of deep pools and undercut banks will be especially attractive for anglers. The surrounding riparian area is robust and diverse and supports all age classes of cottonwood, alder, willow, and dogwood, as well as junipers and a variety of other deciduous shrub species. The habitat for songbirds, woodpeckers, and other riparian species is exceptional. Initial bird surveys on the property in June 2019 indicate high biodiversity owing to the abundance of habitat niches provided by the healthy floodplain habitat.



Photo 5. There is a network of undeveloped trails running through the riparian area on the lower portion of the property. These trails would provide access to Warm Springs Creek for fishing, picnicking, and swimming, and would also take people through the diversity of habitats the floodplain offers.



Photo 6. Though trails are abundant on the lower portion of the property, these trails are limited enough to allow large blocks of floodplain habitat to remain relatively dense and inaccessible. Therefore, the property provides a good balance of recreational access and security for birds and mammals that may use the property for raising young. These features will also make this property highly desirable for wildlife-watching and photography.



Photo 7. Much of the upland portions of the proposed Stumptown Addition consist of a mix of conifer forests and aspens stands. These habitats provide security and foraging opportunities for elk, deer, and moose and also support dusky and ruffed grouse. Aspen stands are particularly important habitats for songbirds and woodpeckers and the value of the proposed acquisition for these species will only increase as the aspen stands continue to mature.



Photo 8. The upland forested acreage surrounds a mosaic of open grassland meadows that ungulates can use for foraging while staying close to dense, secure, forested cover. These openings are isolated from the Stumptown Road and therefore provide open areas for wildlife where they are not highly visible from potentially high-use access points.



Photo 9. The eastern portion of the property consists of an open grassland slope that connects to a portion of the Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area that is used heavily as winter range for elk and deer. The proposed addition would more than double the size of this patch of protected winter range and would protect a relatively rare grassland habitat type in the Anaconda Valley. The border of the proposed acquisition and the current WMA is represented by the jackleg fence visible in the foreground.



Photo 10. View of the Anaconda Valley from the eastern portion of the proposed Stumptown Addition to the Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area. This open slope has documented use by elk and deer in winter and spring and provides early spring green-up for these species during critical times of the year. The property turns into dense mixed-conifer forests and aspen stands on a west-facing slope just behind where this photo was taken, so ungulates have a critical foraging area directly adjacent to security cover.