



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: August 15, 2019

Agenda Item: Whiskey Ridge CE, R4

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: The proposed Whiskey Ridge CE consists of ~4,400 deeded acres of sagebrush-grassland and ponderosa pine-dominated badlands at the threshold of the Missouri Breaks. This property also includes 7,800 acres of state and federal leases. It straddles HDs 417 and 426 and comprises a significant portion of habitat and access to the Southern Missouri River Breaks (HD 482) bighorn sheep herd. The landowner runs a cattle ranch but had sought to diversify his operation by adding domestic sheep. Concerned with the impacts this would have on a portion of the state's largest metapopulation of bighorns, he approached FWP and has since enrolled in the Block Management Program and is now seeking a Conservation Easement (CE) to conserve and protect the wildlife and agricultural values and recreational opportunities on his property in perpetuity. The Wild Sheep Foundation has expressed interest in contributing funding toward this project. A stipulation prohibiting domestic sheep, goats, and llamas would be among the terms FWP would negotiate with the landowner.

Public Involvement Process & Results: Formal public involvement has not been solicited by FWP to date. Upon endorsement by the commission, 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 endorsement of this proposal, allowing the department to further pursue and evaluate the proposal and to offer opportunities for public review and comment.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission endorse the proposal to negotiate the Whiskey Ridge Conservation Easement and complete associated analysis.