

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 13, 2019

Agenda Item: Garry Mountain WMA Addition, (R2)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background: FWP proposed to purchase an approximately 154-acre parcel from YT Timber for inclusion in the Garry Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA), west of Anaconda in Deer Lodge County (see map). The \$416,296 funding for the purchase of the land would come from three sources: \$100,000 from the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust (MFWCT), \$50,000 from Habitat Montana, and \$266,296 from the Montana Natural Resource Damage Program (NRPD). The new parcel would be managed as part of GMWMA, and the primary management purposes of GMWMA would continue to be wildlife habitat enhancement and public recreation, including hunting and fishing along Warm Springs Creek. The purchase of the property would protect a migration corridor for bighorn sheep and valuable wildlife habitat, increase public access and recreational opportunities, and prevent possible future subdivision or development of the property, which would directly impact habitat values on the WMA.

Public Involvement Process & Results: A draft environmental assessment was made available for public comment for 30 days from December 2018 into January 2019. The EA was posted on FWP's website and comments could be made directly on the EA's webpage or submitted via mail or email. Legal notices were published twice each in five local, regional, and statewide newspapers. FWP sent 28 printed copies of the EA and 46 emails of the EA's availability to adjacent landowners and interested individuals, groups, and agencies. A statewide news release was distributed Dec. 21, 2018. FWP held a public hearing in Anaconda (Jan. 3, 2019), and eight people attended, six of whom commented. Also, 16 emailed or written comments were received from 12 people and four sportspersons groups (Anaconda Sportsman's Club, Montana Chapter Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, Montana Wild Sheep Foundation, and Montana Wildlife Federation). Commenters included 11 from Deer Lodge County and nearby areas, eight from other towns in Region 2 and Montana, one from Washington state, and one unknown; at least four of the commenters own land adjacent or nearby the proposed acquisition parcel. In summary, all 21 commenters supported the proposal, and no comments were received in opposition. FWP published a decision notice on January 25, 2019 that supported proceeding with this acquisition.

Alternatives and Analysis: No action is the only viable alternative, which would leave the current ownership pattern in place. The property would likely be subdivided and/or developed, placing traditional public access to the existing WMA from this location in jeopardy. If developed, the bighorn travel corridor would likely be disrupted, and disturbances associated with human development would be felt on adjacent WMA habitats. This proposed addition would bring ownership of the WMA up to a public road, a more suitable boundary.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends that this purchase be completed. The project is strongly supported in the local area and among neighbors to the proposed acquisition. The project would help protect habitat values on the WMA while expanding the conservation footprint – ensuring unimpeded bighorn sheep movements and allowing for additional access to hunting and other wildlife-related recreation.

Proposed Motion: I move that the commission approve FWP's proposal to purchase the approximately 154-acre parcel from YT Timber to add to the Garry Mountain Wildlife Management Area.