

# ***FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** June 13, 2019

**Agenda Item:** Thompson River FAS Acquisition (R1)

**Division:** Fisheries

**Action Needed:** Endorsement

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

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## **Background**

The Thompson River is the lower Clark Fork River's most important trout stream, averaging over 8,000 angler days annually. The mainstem fishery primarily consists of rainbow and brown trout, but many of the river's tributaries provide excellent spawning and rearing habitat for native fish. The lower seven miles of the Thompson River possess the coldest water and provide the best habitat for native fish. During summer months, the lower Thompson River serves as a thermal refuge during high summer temperatures.

Forty acres are available for purchase on the lower Thompson River which includes ¼ mile of the river on both banks. The property is in proximity to the Mount Silcox WMA and is adjacent to National Forest land. It provides habitat for many wildlife species including bighorn sheep. The property also provides habitat for native salmonids such as bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout and mountain whitefish. Most of the funding for this project will be obtained from the Avista Clark Fork Settlement Agreement and the NorthWestern Energy Adaptive Mitigation Fund. These funding sources have a specific goal of native trout restoration, particularly bull trout. Wildlife funds from FWP's Habitat Montana fund were also used with a goal of conserving important wildlife habitat. The Westslope Chapter of Trout Unlimited also committed money with a goal of native trout conservation and public access. The property will be held and managed as an undeveloped, walk-in FAS with wildlife benefits in mind. The site would be a day-use only site with no camping allowed.

## **Public Involvement Process & Results**

The proposed project is generally supported by local angling groups, the Westslope Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and NorthWestern Energy and Avista mitigation programs. If the commission endorses moving forward with this project, FWP would initiate a due diligence process that includes an EA and public comment period.

## **Alternatives and Analysis**

The commission could choose to endorse this proposal for FWP to initiate the due diligence process to acquire and develop the property as a FAS. Conversely, the commission could choose to not endorse this proposal and FWP would not pursue development of a FAS. This could limit angler access to the area and increase risk of development not conducive to fish and wildlife management.

## **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends the commission endorse this proposed project due to the importance of the river for native fish species, recreational fishing, and important terrestrial habitat for wildlife such as bighorn sheep.

## **Proposed Motion**

I move that the commission endorse FWP's proposal to pursue the purchase of 40 acres on the lower Thompson River to create a walk-in Fishing Access Site.