

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE
Grassy Mountain Addition Fee Title Acquisition
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 3, Bozeman
3 January 2020

Preface and Proposed Action

This Decision Notice has been prepared to purchase in fee title a 244-acre parcel of private land adjacent to Mt. Haggin Wildlife Management Area. It is located approximately 10 miles south of Anaconda along MT Highway 569 ("Mill Creek Highway"). The property is owned by Haddox Ventures LLC. The value of the property has been appraised at \$658,900. FWP would pay the appraised value using Habitat Montana and possibly other partner funds, including a contribution from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Upon purchase, the Grassy Mountain Addition property would be incorporated into the management of the existing Mt. Haggin WMA and be managed for its wildlife, fisheries and recreational values. It would not be incorporated into any existing grazing leases on the WMA. Motorized travel would be restricted to snow machine use December 2-May 15, consistent with management on the adjacent portion of the WMA.

The Grassy Mountain Addition property is bordered by Mt. Haggin WMA and the recently acquired 160-acre Mt. Haggin Addition parcel. It contributes to the ecological function of the WMA and surrounding Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. It is part of the migration pathway for mule deer and elk, connecting winter range on the west side of the Continental Divide to calving/fawning areas and summer range east of the divide. Mid-seral lodgepole forests on the property provide calving/fawning areas and elk security in the fall. Mesic meadows located on the property and the associated aspen- and willow stands provide year-round habitat for moose, beaver, black bear, ruffed grouse, short-tailed weasel and numerous other small- and mid-sized mammals, neotropical birds, and potential amphibians and reptiles. The Grassy Mountain Addition also provides summer habitat for sandhill cranes, several species of songbirds, and foraging raptors. Oregon Creek runs along the western portion of the property and provides suitable habitat for brook trout.

The proposed acquisition by FWP would ensure that Mt. Haggin WMA and this parcel would continue to serve the needs of wildlife. The proposed acquisition would provide additional public access for hunting, angling, trapping, wildlife-watching and other recreational opportunities.

Public Process and Comments

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by FWP and released for public comment on 3 December 2019.

Public comments on the proposed action were taken for 30 days (through 2 January 2020). The public was notified of the proposed action through the following avenues:

- Open house held at from 5-7 PM at the Butte Area Resource Office on 11 December 2019.
- Two legal notices in Butte *Montana Standard*, Anaconda *Leader*, and Helena *Independent Record*.
- News release distributed to a standard list of media outlets interested in FWP Region 3 issues.
- Copies of the EA mailed or notification of its availability emailed to neighboring landowners and other interested parties, including those on the Butte Area Wildlife Biologist's distribution list.
- Public notice posted on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>
- Copies of the EA available at FWP Region 3 Headquarters and Butte Area Resource Office; by phoning 406-494-2082; or by emailing vbocadori@mt.gov.

Eleven parties submitted comments on the proposal. All were in support of the proposed action (Table 1).

FWP thanks all parties that provided comments to this proposed action.

Table 1: Summary of comments received on the Grassy Mountain Addition proposal.

PARTY	FROM	SUPPORT or OPPOSE	COMMENTS
1. Individual	Butte	Support	“This looks like a great opportunity for all sportsmen and should be acted on. This addition to Mt. Haggin is an area close to home for many of us and will continue to make the area one of the most family friendly locations to recreate.”
2. Individual	Butte	Support	“I am in favor of FWP acquiring the 244-acre Grassy Mountain parcel. The more public land the better.”
3. Individual	Butte	Support	<p>“This remarkably fortuitous opportunity to both expand the WMA for the public and make the recent acquisition of adjacent lands more robust for wildlife and fisheries is an opportunity that simply should not be missed. Though the primary driver for the purchase appears to be big game habitat and hunting access — the location of Oregon Creek on the property would seem to be an amazing addition to the enhancement of the native trout fishery project and public access to that awesomely unique resource that is unfolding. The lay of the stream through the area looks to open up a significantly greater stretch of stream for improvements to the WMA fishery along with future public access to enjoy that effort. The fisheries work taking place in the drainage has the potential to alleviate a tremendous burden on the Big Hole River system with respect to the Grayling issues and huge loss of historic range for Westslope Cutthroat trout and it would be black mark on all of us to pass on an opening to aid those species on public lands.</p> <p>The expansion also allows for a larger area of contiguous land without fencing to facilitate wildlife movements. Hopefully, if the land can be included in the WMA, any new perimeter fencing will be constructed to a wildlife friendly standard.</p> <p>The habitat value of this parcel along with the relatively easy access to public use, and prospect of increasing the power of ongoing upgrades to the WMA are invaluable compared to the prospect of seeing the land chopped up for a subdivision. I cannot help but feel that these two hundred and some acres will have a butterfly effect on the overall ecology of the wild lands of the area near and far.”</p>
4. Individual	Unknown	Support	“After reading the report re: Grassy Mt. Addition, I concur with its findings and agree that this acquisition be completed as proposed.”

5. Individual	Emigrant	Support	"I support Alternative B the Proposed Action. The FWP should purchase in fee title the proposed addition to Mt. Haggin WMA, the price is fair and it will make a great addition to the WMA."
6. Montana Wildlife Federation	Statewide	Support	"MWF is strongly supportive of the proposed purchase of approximately 244 acres of private land adjacent to the Mt. Haggin Wildlife Management Area... MWF considers this an excellent use of Habitat Montana funds and commends the Department for preserving this land."
7. Jefferson Valley Sportsmen Association	Whitehall	Support	"The Jefferson Valley Sportsman's Association supports the proposed Grassy Mountain Addition to the Mount Haggin Wildlife Management Area. The addition would secure corridors for big game and other wildlife migration. It has diverse habitats including fishery and other water associated values. We have seen the development of the I-90 corridor and believe that this proposal is timely and prudent. "
8. Anaconda Sportsmen Club	Anaconda	Support	"We are in total support of this 244-acre acquisition to the Mt. Haggin WMA. It compliments the newly acquired property addition next to it. This gives the public access to an area that is currently enjoyed by only a few from private property. ... Development on this property would ruin the peacefulness and move wildlife off it. Therefore, we the Anaconda Sportsmen Club strongly urge the FWP to acquire this property."
9. Anaconda-Deer Lodge County Commission	Anaconda	Support	"The Anaconda-Deer Lodge County would like to express its support for the Grassy Mountain Addition to the Mt. Haggin Wildlife Management Area. The purchase will benefit the people and wildlife of the area. It will protect habitat and provide recreational opportunities for future generations as well as enhanced public access to the existing Mount Haggin Wildlife Management Area."
10. Individual	Anaconda	Support	"This is an extremely attractive addition to the Mt. Haggin WMA. The property provides for a large diversity of wildlife such as elk, deer, bear and moose. It also offers exceptional recreational opportunities to the public such as hiking, photography, hunting and cross-country skiing. ...It is user friendly for family and individual outings... I believe the acquisition of the land by FWP will make Deer Lodge County more of an attraction to outdoor recreationists. ... This is a fortunate chance to acquire a real beautiful parcel of land that benefits both wildlife and the public."
11. Southwestern Wildlands Chapter of the Montana	Butte	Support	"Our membership is made up of a multitude of recreational users, including hikers, cross-country skiers, hunters and horsemen, all of whom would enjoy this addition."

Wilderness Association			Any roadless and/or non-motorized acres will benefit the diverse habitat that supports large and small wildlife that thrive in this landscape. This addition would benefit conservation, the local economy, and create new opportunities for Montanans to enjoy spectacular recreation in this wild landscape. Due to this addition's close proximity to the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness, the USFS recommended additions to the Wilderness, the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, and the many sections of surrounding USFS public lands, it makes good sense and good public policy for this project to move forward. We stand in full support of this proposed addition."
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Final Environmental Assessment

The Draft Environmental Assessment, together with this Decision Notice, will serve as the final document for this proposal.

Decision

Based on the Environmental Assessment and public comment, it is my decision to approve the proposed action to purchase the Grassy Mountain Addition, a 244-acre parcel adjacent to the existing Mt. Haggin WMA, pending FWP Commission and MT State Land Board approval.

I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.



Mark Deleray
 Region 3 Supervisor
 Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

3 January 2020

Date