



## MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** April 23, 2020

**Agenda Item:** Woods Ranch WMA Blowdown Salvage Project, Region 1

**Action Needed:** Final Approval

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

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**Background:** The Wood's Ranch Wildlife Management Area (WRWMA) is 1,474 acres in size and located 5.5 miles north of Eureka. On Nov. 27, 2019, a major wind event hit northwest Montana, resulting in significant blowdown across the west side of the Whitefish Range and affecting the WRWMA. Most of the forested acreage on the WMA was found to be impacted to varying degrees. FWP is proposing to conduct timber salvage treatments on approximately 86 acres. FWP is also proposing to monitor bark beetle infestation within the project area (encompassing approximately 445 acres) and remove infested trees for up to five years (through April 2025).

The purpose of this project is to reduce accumulations of downed timber, which is expected to benefit elk and deer movement and foraging, cavity nesting species (through the retention of broken top snags), and recreational use, while reducing fuel loading and susceptibility of adjacent stands to future bark beetle infestation. Income from the project would offset costs and possibly contribute toward the FWP Forest Management Account while helping to support the local timber industry. If approved, mechanized tree removal could begin as early as July 2020 and would be concluded by March 2021. FWP would also monitor bark beetle activity in adjacent forest stands for the next five years and potentially remove infested trees to reduce the potential for an outbreak.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** A draft environmental assessment (EA) was available for public review for 30 days from February to March 2020. FWP received nine comments during the public review period -- eight from individuals and one from the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (MTSHPO). Eight commenters supported the proposed action, no commenters were in opposition, and one commenter (from MTSHPO) did not state support or opposition.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** No action would prescribe that the fallen trees remain on the ground indefinitely. This would increase the risk of bark beetle infestation to adjacent stands of live trees within one year, restrict ungulate movement in the blowdown area, and establish a high understory fire-fuel load on portions of the WRWMA.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** FWP recommends the commission approve the proposed action to move forward with project implementation.

**Proposed Motion:** I move the commission approve the timber salvage on the Woods Ranch WMA as proposed.