



# MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** August 13, 2020

**Agenda Item:** W-Bar Conservation Easement, Region 7

**Action Needed:** Final Approval    **Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

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**Background:** FWP proposes to purchase a conservation easement (CE) on approximately 6,751 acres in Wibaux County. The CE, known as the W-Bar Conservation Easement, would protect and enhance large intact native grasslands, shrublands, numerous hardwood draws, and riparian habitat. The property comprises the largest intact parcel of Beaver Creek from its headwaters to the North Dakota line, encompassing more than 11 miles of important riparian habitat along Beaver Creek and more than 10 miles along Dry Creek and other tributaries. The project area provides excellent year-round habitat for mule deer and white-tailed deer and supports wild turkey, sharp-tailed grouse, gray partridge, antelope, occasional elk, native and introduced game fish, and a diversity of nongame wildlife including 24 Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

The CE would preclude conversion of native ground, limit development, institute grazing standards, and offer managed public access opportunities in perpetuity. An independent appraisal valued the CE at \$2,195,000. A combination of Pittman-Robertson and Habitat Montana dollars would be the primary funding sources for this project.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** An initial public review was conducted from 12/23/19 to 1/24/20. Fourteen comments were received and addressed in the EA. The draft EA was released on 5/29/20, a public hearing was held in Wibaux on 6/18/20, and the comment period concluded 6/27/20. Four comments were received during the EA comment period. Three expressed support for the CE and the fourth comment expressed concern about the source of funding and associated recreation requirements, which FWP addressed in the Decision Notice. The Decision Notice was released on 6/30/20 that recommended proceeding with the CE.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** Proposed Action: To purchase the W-Bar Easement on high-priority wildlife habitat. This would assure habitat functions and public recreational access while remaining in private ownership. No Action: FWP would forego a partnership to conserve and enhance valuable wildlife habitats and to ensure public access.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** FWP recommends approval of this proposal to conserve and enhance wildlife habitat and public recreation opportunities on this land.

**Proposed Motion:**

I move the commission approve FWP's purchase of the W-Bar Conservation Easement as presented.