

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE**  
**for the**  
**Mt Haggin WMA-German Gulch Grazing Lease Renewal**

**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks**  
**Region 3, Bozeman**  
**March 9, 2020**

**Preface**

The enclosed Decision Notice has been prepared to renew the Mount Haggin Wildlife Management Area-German Gulch grazing lease for a 10-year term to extend June 2021 through October 2030. The grazing lease is part of a cooperative grazing program with the U.S. Forest Service on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest which began in 1989. It consists of a rest-rotation grazing system for 436 Animal Unit Months with the Peterson Fairmont Ranch. The proposed grazing program would encompass approximately 9,287 acres owned by FWP and approximately 10,829 acres administered by the USFS. Total acreage involved would be approximately 20,106 acres. This cooperative grazing system allows for landscape level management of elk winter range, along with wildlife habitat in general, across ownerships and has demonstrated the compatibility of livestock production and wildlife/recreation-based economies.

**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 January 31, 2020.

The following two alternatives were considered in this Environmental Assessment:

Alternative A: Renewal of the Mt. Haggin WMA-German Gulch grazing lease.

Alternative B: Elimination of livestock grazing on the Mt. Haggin WMA portion of the German Gulch cooperative grazing system with the USFS.

Public comments were taken for 30 days (through February 29, 2020). The public was informed of this EA via the following:

- Two legal notices each in Butte *Montana Standard* and Helena *Independent Record*.
- 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](mailto:vbocadori@mt.gov).

Five parties submitted comments during the 30-day comment period ending at 5:00 p.m. on February 29, 2020. Of the respondents, four parties represented him/herself while the other represented Skyline Sportsmen's Association. Four parties supported Alternative A. One party did not state support for either alternative.

**FWP thanks all parties that took the time to provide comments to the Mt. Haggin WMA-German Gulch grazing Lease Renewal proposal.**

Table 1: Summary of comments received on the Mt. Haggin WMA-German Gulch grazing lease renewal proposal. FWP response to comments, where applicable, are in **bold**.

PARTY	FROM	SUPPORT or OPPOSE	COMMENTS
1. Individual	Butte	Support	<p>“The program has been mutually beneficial for all concerned and demonstrates a far too rare example of positive cooperation to satisfy public and private need. The nature of the program highlights the fact that the natural ecosystem pays scant attention to artificial human boundaries with respect to what is best for the resource. The value of the private lands for wildlife and public access for managed recreation, the brokered fees for public infrastructure maintenance, and value of public lands for the benefit of the local producers are all things that should be encouraged whenever possible where the resources can be utilized in a complimentary fashion.”</p>
2. Individual	Butte	Support	<p>“By this email (I) offer full support for the MT. Haggin rest-rotation. I have seen this rest-rotation grazing allotment since its inception; it has continued to provide outstanding benefits to the wildlife resource and must continue as is.”</p>
3. Individual	Anaconda	Support	<p>“These leases seem up to par and have always worked in the past. I think it's great that the grouse have habitat in Connor gulch. This is a great grassland and plenty of room for cattle and elk. It's been managed well in the past. The only damage I've seen to riparian areas are from people and their utvs. I support these grazing leases.”</p>
4. Skyline Sportsmen’s Association	Butte	Support	<p>“Skyline has always supported both rest-rotation grazing, when used properly, and multiple-use programs on both public lands and WMAs.”</p>
5. Individual	Bozeman	No position stated	<p>“I hope the managing agencies continue to be concerned about overstocking and impacts to riparian areas.”</p> <p><b><i>FWP response: FWP is dedicated to managing fish and wildlife habitat. Controlled livestock grazing programs on WMAs are designed with habitat conditions, capacity and the needs for fish and wildlife in mind. Permittees use mineral blocks to move cattle away from riparian areas. Cattle are moved on calendar days, even if ample forage still exists in the pasture. Pastures receive scheduled rest from grazing during the growing season at least two out of every 3 years.</i></b></p> <p>“Using mineral blocks to move cattle away from riparian areas is not mentioned in the German Gulch EA.”</p> <p><b><i>FWP response: This was an oversight. Thank you for pointing this out.</i></b></p> <p>“What guarantee is there of low stocking rates?”</p> <p><b><i>FWP response: The lessees sign a lease with the stated Animal Use. They can put less than this amount but they cannot put more on the WMA.</i></b></p>

**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 renew the Mt. Haggin WMA-German Gulch grazing lease, pending MT's Fish & Wildlife Commission 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.



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Mark Deleray  
Region 3 Supervisor  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

3.9.2020  
Date