



# MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** April 1, 2021

**Agenda Item:** Cree Crossing WMA Hay Lease, Region 6

**Action Needed:** Final Approval

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

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**Background:** The 397-acre Cree Crossing Wildlife Management Area (WMA) was purchased by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks in 2009 using funds from FWP's Habitat Montana program. The primary goal of the Cree Crossing WMA is to restore and manage the riparian and upland habitats for the benefit of wildlife, with upland game birds being the primary focus. Prior to becoming a WMA, a large portion of the property was under crop. In 2009 and again in 2013, approximately 89 and 40 acres, respectively, of previously cropped lands were planted in a dense nesting cover mix. Over time, the nesting cover has become extremely dense and is currently not as beneficial to ground nesting and brood-rearing birds. A haying treatment over approximately 1/3 of these stands (43 acres), would improve nesting cover conditions on the WMA.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** FWP released a draft environment assessment (EA) for public review of the proposed haying lease on February 24, 2021, and accepted public comment until March 15, 2021. FWP received one public comment in support for the Cree Crossing WMA draft EA, but also provided comments to improve the proposed haying activities. The EA was amended to account for the recommendation. FWP issued a Decision Notice on March 16, 2021, in support for the lease, contingent on commission approval.

**Alternatives and Analysis:**

Proposed Action: Provide a one-year haying lease for 2021; vegetation and wildlife would benefit from the removal of old, decadent vegetative structure and would increase foraging opportunities for broods and other wildlife.

No Action: A hay lease would not be initiated; FWP may not have the resources to conduct the habitat enhancement efforts at the proposed scale.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** FWP recommends approval to establish a one-year haying lease, providing enhanced wildlife habitat and associated future hunting opportunities.

**Proposed Motion:** I move the commission approve the haying lease on Cree Crossing WMA as proposed.