



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: June 24, 2021

Agenda Item: Brown's Lake FAS Peninsula Acquisition, Region 2

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 Minutes

Background:

FWP is seeking endorsement to pursue acquiring approximately 14 acres of the Browns Lake Fishing Access Site in Powell County. The FAS provides a boat ramp and camp sites to visitors and is one of the most popular FAS's in Region 2. This portion of the FAS is currently leased from a private landowner and is the most expensive FAS lease in Montana. Continued long-term leasing of the site by FWP is challenging due to the high cost, so FWP and partners have been working for decades on a potential solution. Unfortunately, past efforts never materialized due to discrepancies between the appraised value of the FAS and its public value to the citizens of Montana as a popular recreation area. FWP, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and The Conservation Fund (TCF) met to discuss the possibility of FWP acquiring the peninsula, paired with the sale of USFWS conservation easements on the landowner's other properties to allow the landowner to acquire a neighboring property and expand their ranch. The neighboring property is not expected to be available for long, and critical elements, such as appraised values, need to be addressed prior to any additional steps. TCF is proposing to purchase the FAS property as an interim holder while FWP would conduct its due diligence, appraisals, and public engagement through MEPA. FWP would continue to seek approval from the commission and State Land Board. As proposed, FWP would have time to work through these processes, eventually acquiring the FAS from TCF for appraised value.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

Formal public involvement has not been solicited by FWP to date. If endorsed by the commission, the department would prepare a draft EA, collect public comment, host a public hearing, and prepare additional outreach for public input. The results of the public involvement process would inform FWP's final proposal for action at a future commission meeting.

Alternatives & Analysis:

The commission could endorse this proposal and the department would initiate public process and due diligence to acquire the parcel. The commission could choose not to endorse the proposal and the department would not seek acquisition at this time; the department would continue to lease the property as long as costs allow. Acquiring the parcel is expected to simplify FWP management of the site and would allow the department out of a long-term and expensive lease. Additionally, the proposal provides opportunity for the current landowner to sell the parcel that includes the peninsula and acquire neighboring land for ranching.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission endorse the department's proposal to pursue acquisition of the Brown's Lake Fishing Access Site and complete associated due diligence and analysis.