



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: June 24, 2021

Agenda Item: Bull River and Kootenai Falls WMA Blowdown Salvage

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

Background: The Bull River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is 1,576 acres in size and located 17 air-miles southwest of Libby. The Kootenai Falls WMA is 172 acres in size and located 7 air-miles west of Libby. Both WMAs are heavily forested and are managed for a variety of wildlife species, with an emphasis on big-game habitat. The Bull River WMA provides important elk and deer winter range habitat. The Kootenai Falls WMA and the steep, rocky lands immediately adjacent to it are important big horn sheep habitat.

On Jan. 13, 2021, a major wind event resulted in windthrow of trees across western Montana. The Bull River and Kootenai Falls WMAs experienced significant blowdown. Approximately 150 acres across both WMAs were found to be impacted to varying degrees. The trees affected are a mix of lodgepole pine, Douglas-fir, western larch, and ponderosa pine.

Upon initial field reconnaissance, FWP determined that some of the blowdown trees should be removed to reduce the risk of bark-beetle infestation and reduce the potential fuel hazard created from the windthrown trees. FWP seeks endorsement from the commission to further evaluate the potential for a timber salvage of the blown down trees. Because timber value rapidly declines from decay and wood-boring insects within the first year of windthrown trees, timely timber salvage is critical so the value of the trees can be used to offset the cost of removing the trees. The project may have enough timber value to generate some funding to for depositing in the Forest Management Account for funding future WMA forestry work.

Public Involvement Process & Results: Upon endorsement by the commission, FWP would conduct an environmental assessment (EA) with the opportunity for public review and comment.

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 forest stands and create a fuel hazard that may threaten adjacent private lands and could negatively impact the quality of wildlife habitat on the WMAs in the event of a wildfire. FWP would evaluate factors associated with timber salvage such as the ecological, economic, and social consequences. Tree salvage has the potential to affect (positively or negatively) soils and watersheds, risk of insect infestation, susceptibility to wildfire, reestablishment of understory vegetation, snag removal, wildlife movement, and recreation.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the commission endorse this proposal, allowing FWP to develop a more detailed proposal and associated analysis and public review.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission endorse the blowdown timber salvage on the Bull River and Kootenai Falls WMAs, allowing FWP to conduct further analysis and public review.