



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: October 28, 2021

Agenda Item: Bull River Wildlife Management Area Timber Salvage (Region 1)

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: A windstorm in January 2021 resulted in significant windthrow of trees on the Bull River Wildlife Management Area (BRWMA), located south of Troy in Sanders and Lincoln counties. FWP is proposing to remove the downed trees and conduct aspen enhancement and fuels reduction treatments on approximately 373 acres. If approved, work could start as early as December 2021. The objectives of the project are: 1) reduce susceptibility of adjacent stands of trees to future bark beetle infestation, 2) reduce fuel loading adjacent to private lands east of the BRWMA, 3) promote growth and regeneration of aspen, 4) improve quality of habitat for a variety of wildlife, 5) sell resulting merchantable timber byproducts to offset the cost of the treatment before the trees lose commercial value, and 6) if surplus revenue is generated from the project, use those funds to pay for future rehabilitation and forest management on the BRWMA as well as forest management work on other FWP properties across the state. Treatments would involve the removal of conifer trees (both merchantable and submerchantable) through a combination of mechanical and non-mechanical treatments. The purpose of this project is to improve wildlife habitat; this project would not be proposed if not for a need to conserve and improve wildlife habitat on the BRWMA.

Public Involvement Process & Results: An Environmental Assessment (EA) that sought public review of the proposed forest management activities was available for public review on FWP's website from July 2 through August 2, 2021. FWP mailed 30 postcards and emailed 45 notifications of the EA's availability to adjacent landowners and interested parties. Legal notices were published in three local, regional and statewide newspapers, and a statewide news release was issued. No public comments were received on this proposal.

Alternatives and Analysis: The proposed action and no-action alternatives were analyzed in the EA. Under the no-action alternative, the downed trees would remain on-site indefinitely. Downed trees would be an impediment for big game access to the area. Adjacent stands of trees would be at an increased risk to bark beetle infestation and the downed trees would be a fire hazard and could threaten adjacent private land in the event of a wildfire. Timber value would rapidly decline after the first year from decay and wood boring insects. No aspen enhancement or fuels reduction would be undertaken at this time.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends that the commission approve this proposal, allowing FWP to implement forest management activities on the BRWMA.

Proposed Motion: I move that the commission approve timber salvage and management activities on the Bull River Wildlife Management Area as proposed.