



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: April 19, 2022

Action Needed: Final

Agenda Item: Renewal of Canyon Ferry WMA agricultural and bee yard leases

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks manages the Canyon Ferry Wildlife Management Area (CFWMA) through a management agreement with the Bureau of Reclamation and is authorized to offer leases in return for cash payment or in exchange for services provided by a lessee. The CFWMA's agricultural leases have existed for decades and have been managed to produce FWP-approved agricultural crops that provide benefits to a variety of wildlife species, typically grain (or an approved alternative crop) and alfalfa hay in an approximately 50/50 ratio. The agricultural leases have approximately 704 acres of irrigated cropland total. The proposed action would retain the long-standing status quo. The agricultural leases provide food and cover for a host of wildlife species that utilize the CFWMA while also demonstrating that sustainable agricultural production can co-exist with wildlife and even benefit many wildlife species. In addition to the farmed areas, areas adjacent to the crop and hayfields have been developed, in conjunction with the lessees, for shelterbelts and nesting cover over the years.

The proposal is to renew six current agricultural leases and the one existing bee yard (apiary) lease on the CFWMA. The leases will be for a seven-year period (1/1/2023-12/31/2029) and will either be a cash lease or in-kind lease and will require leaving 12.5% and 15% of the standing crop, respectively. The process for setting the agricultural lease rates will be explained in detail in each lease agreement.

- Parcel 45A – 281 acres
- Parcel 47 – 108 acres
- Parcel 48 – 90 acres
- Parcel 62A & 63A – 111 acres
- Parcel 73A – 114 acres
- Parcel 90 – 200 acres
- Bee (apiary) lease

Public Involvement Process & Results:

An environmental assessment (EA) was done to address the potential impacts of renewing or not renewing the agricultural leases on the CFWMA. The draft EA was announced in local newspapers and on FWP's webpage and was out for a 30-day comment period, which ended on March 2, 2023. One comment was received.

Alternatives and Analysis:

Alternative A: No Action - Under the No Action alternative the agricultural leases on the CFWMA would not be renewed. This would likely have negative impacts on a variety of wildlife species that utilize CFWMA. It would also likely damage FWP's standing or relationship with the local agricultural community and the community of Townsend as a whole.

Alternative B: Proposed Action - FWP would renew the six existing agricultural leases and the one existing bee yard lease for seven years (2023-2029). Agricultural leases have existed on the CFWMA for decades and, as such, the proposed action would retain the long-standing status quo.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

FWP's recommendation is to approve the renewal of the six existing agricultural leases and the one existing bee yard (apiary lease) on the CFWMA for seven years (1/1/2023-12/31/2029).

Proposed Motion:

I move the commission approve the six existing agricultural leases and the one existing bee yard (apiary) lease on the Canyon Ferry WMA.