



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: April 19, 2022

Agenda Item: Seven Sisters WMA Farming Lease Renewal, R7

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: Seven Sisters Wildlife Management Area is located in FWP Region 7 near Crane. The WMA was purchased by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks to maintain a woodland/cropland complex to benefit a diversity of wildlife while providing substantial hunting opportunities, primarily for white-tailed deer and pheasants. FWP proposes to renew a farming lease agreement for up to 10 years on 323 acres of the WMA with Steve Pust. The lessee would harvest a portion of the hay/grain crop and leave 25% of crops and 35% of irrigated hay standing for wildlife use. The type and location of crops would be approved by FWP. The location and configuration of standing crops would be determined by FWP. Dryland grass stands may be cut for hay as needed to rejuvenate stands for wildlife benefit, as directed by FWP. The benefit and purpose of the lease is to provide winter habitat and forage, primarily for wintering pheasants, deer, and turkeys. Standing crops also benefit migrating waterfowl and a variety of other wildlife species.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The environmental assessment for the project was released on Jan. 21, 2022, with comments accepted through Feb. 20. FWP received two comments on the proposed lease, both contained suggested modifications to lease terms, which were addressed in a decision notice issued on Feb. 25, in support of the agricultural lease, contingent on commission approval.

Alternatives and Analysis: Under the no-action alternative, agricultural lands would not be cultivated and FWP would need to commit resources to manage the previously cultivated 323 acres of farm fields, and wildlife would be negatively impacted by the reduced wintering habitat and forage resources. Renewing the agricultural lease would benefit wildlife by providing improved winter habitat and forage; therefore, the lessee, FWP, and hunters would benefit from the lease agreements.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the commission approve renewal of the agricultural lease on Seven Sisters WMA, which would provide improved winter forage for wildlife and promote quality hunting opportunities.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission approve the agricultural lease on Seven Sisters WMA as proposed.