

From: [Engle, Jazmin](#)
To: [McClain, Kammi](#)
Subject: FW: Montana BHA comments on the Big Snowy Mountains WMA Acquisition
Date: Friday, July 22, 2022 11:05:56 AM
Attachments: [Montana BHA Comments on Big Snowy Mountains WMA Acquisition.pdf](#)

Hey Kammi,

Are you collecting the public comments on Big Snowy?

Jazmin Engle

Director's Office

[Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks](#)

P.O. Box 200701

Helena, MT 59620-0701

Ph: (406) 444-7826

[Montana FWP](#) | [Montana Outdoors Magazine](#)



THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

From: Montana Chapter <montana@backcountryhunters.org>
Sent: Friday, July 22, 2022 10:44 AM
To: Engle, Jazmin <Jazmin.Engle@mt.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Fwd: Montana BHA comments on the Big Snowy Mountains WMA Acquisition

Hey Jazmin - Just wanted to make sure this gets to everyone who needs to see it, and included in the public comments compilation.

Thank you!

-Kevin

Begin forwarded message:

From: Montana Chapter <montana@backcountryhunters.org>
Subject: Montana BHA comments on the Big Snowy Mountains WMA Acquisition
Date: July 21, 2022 at 4:27:57 PM MDT
To: "commissionerregion1@mtfwp.org" <commissionerregion1@mtfwp.org>, "commissionerregion2@mtfwp.org" <commissionerregion2@mtfwp.org>, "CommissionerRegion3@mtfwp.org" <CommissionerRegion3@mtfwp.org>

"commissionerregion4@mtfwp.org" <commissionerregion4@mtfwp.org>,
"commissionerregion5@mtfwp.org" <commissionerregion5@mtfwp.org>,
"commissionerregion6@mtfwp.org" <commissionerregion6@mtfwp.org>,
"commissionerregion7@mtfwp.org" <commissionerregion7@mtfwp.org>

Cc: Montana Chapter <montana@backcountryhunters.org>, Doug Krings
<Doug@alliedsteelmt.com>

Chair Robinson; Vice Chair Tabor, Commissioners Waller, Byorth, Walsh, Cebull and Lane:

On behalf of Montana BHA, attached are comments re: the Big Snowy Mountains WMA Acquisiton

We thank you for your careful consideration and appreciate the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Doug Krings, Central Montana Regional Board Member
Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers



**BACKCOUNTRY
HUNTERS & ANGLERS
MONTANA**

July 21, 2022

Chair Robinson, Vice Chair Tabor, Commissioners Waller, Byorth, Walsh, Cebull & Lane
Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks
1420 East Sixth Avenue
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, Mt 59620-0701

Re: the Big Snowy Mountains WMA Acquisition

Chair Robinson; Vice Chair Tabor, Commissioners Waller, Byorth, Walsh, Cebull and Lane:

On behalf of roughly 3,000 dues-paying members in the Big Sky state, please consider the below comments from the Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers re: the Big Snowy Mountains WMA Acquisition, and our full and enthusiastic support of this purchase.

Our members value wild places, public access, quality habitat and the fair-chase hunting and fishing opportunities these things provide. It should come as no surprise then how excited we are for this potential acquisition and creation of a new Wildlife Management Area in one of the most elk-rich and access-poor areas of the state. We voiced our support when this proposal was in front of the Fish and Wildlife Commission in 2020, during the Department's EA, and here we are again offering our support.

And we're not alone. During the EA, FWP received 107 public comments; 97 percent of those supported this acquisition.

The EA prepared by the Department showed very few and very minor negative impacts from this purchase proposal, while the benefits are enormous. The property is not farmed, nor does it consist of any crop land; it's native prairie grassland offering prime habitat for a wide variety of wildlife including elk, black bear, mule deer, pronghorn - all things are members take great value in - plus "at least 22 animals listed as species of concern," according to the Department. In other



words, preserving this landscape would offer both sporting opportunity and important biological value.

The 5,677 acres in question north of Ryegate and at the base of the Big Snowy Mountains consist of roughly 2,500 forested acres and 3,177 acres of prairie rangeland, an ideal mix for big game habitat and winter range. Adjacent to the north of this property is BLM's Twin Coulee Wilderness Area and the US Forest Service's Big Snowies Wilderness Study Area. Adding this WMA would create a wild land and wildlife-rich complex of more than 100,000 acres, with even more public lands to the northwest.

The other two-thirds of the property are bordered by private parcels owned by out-of-state absentee landowners; public hunting on adjacent properties is rarely allowed, according to FWP's press release. Situations like these are likely a big reason why the hunting area this property resides in - district 535 - is significantly over the stated elk management objectives. Preserving this property and opening it to public hunting will not only provide incredible opportunities for Montana hunters, but it will also help with elk management concerns in the area.

The purchase price of approximately \$8.22 million is money well spent, and money that's available for exactly this sort of project. 75 percent of the purchase price will be covered by the Federal Pittman Robertson Wildlife Restoration funds, which comes from excise taxes on hunting and shooting equipment, while the remaining 25 percent will come from Habitat Montana, the state's premiere funding mechanism for habitat conservation and public access work. Habitat Montana is funded by sportsmen and women from our hunting license sales, and hunters show up in Helena session after session to express their support for the program and what it funds. Projects like the one before us in the Big Snowy Mountains are shining examples of why hunters are so fond of this Habitat Montana program and happy to contribute to it.

We would like to thank Shodair Children's Hospital for their original vision and generosity which got this ball rolling. Our appreciation extends to our friends at the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation as well for helping usher this project through.



In closing, this project speaks to all things Montana BHA cares deeply about and we support it with great enthusiasm; we cannot think of a better use for federal PR dollars or Habitat Montana funds than a project like this that will have significant and lasting impacts for wildlife, for habitat and for the sportsmen and women of Montana. We strongly agree with FWP's recommendation that 'the commission approve FWP purchasing approximately 5,677 acres in the foothills of the Big Snowy Mountains,' and we ask that the Commission give this your full blessing.

Sincerely,

Doug Krings, Lewistown, MT
Regional Board Member
Montana Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers



Subject: FW: [EXTERNAL] MWF Comments re August Commission Meeting
Attachments: MWF Commission Comments - WMU 313 and 316 Quota.pdf; MWF 2022 May PHEASANT RELEASE Comments (1).pdf; Commission Comments - FWP HABITAT CONSERVATION LEASE AGREEMENTS.pdf; Commission Comments - Big Snowy Wildlife Management Area Acquisition.pdf

From: Marcus Strange <mstrange@mtwf.org>
Sent: Thursday, July 21, 2022 1:04 PM
To: FWP Commission <FWComm@mt.gov>
Cc: CommissionerRegion5@mtfw.org; CommissionerRegion2@mtfw.org; CommissionerRegion1@mtfw.org; CommissionerRegion3@mtfw.org; KC Walsh <commissionerregion4@mtfw.org>; CommissionerRegion6@mtfw.org; CommissionerRegion7@mtfw.org; Worsech, Hank <Hank.Worsech@mt.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] MWF Comments re August Commission Meeting

Dear FWP Commission,

Please find the attached comments regarding the upcoming commission meeting agenda items:

1. Pheasant Release
2. Big Snowy Acquisition
3. Trapping and Wolf Seasons
4. Habitat Conservation Leases

I'm looking forward to seeing you all next month. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

If the commission staff would confirm the receipt of these materials I would be very grateful.

Cheers!



Marcus Strange (He/Him)

Director of State Policy and Government Relations
Montana Wildlife Federation

 [facebook.com]  [linkedin.com]  [instagram.com]

 (406) 916-2585

 mstrange@mtwf.org

 www.montanawildlife.org [montanawildlife.org]

 PO Box 1175, Helena, MT, 59624

Become a Wildlife Advocate [montanawildlife.org]

I gratefully acknowledge I live, work, hunt, fish, and grow in the homeland of the Niitsítpiis-stahkoi and Salish Kootenai. Visit <https://native-land.ca/native-land.ca> to learn more about the Indigenous land where you live.



Protecting Montana's wildlife, land, waters, and hunting & fishing heritage for future generations.

19 July 2022

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Commission
1420 East Sixth Avenue
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

RE: Big Snowy Wildlife Management Area Acquisition

Dear Chair Robinson,

The Montana Wildlife Federation (MWF) is the state's largest hunter advocacy organization consisting of thousands of Montanans who value sound wildlife management and our storied hunting and outdoor legacy. Together with our 19 affiliate clubs, we ensure the conservation dollars are efficiently spent on wildlife conservation-related activities, promote sound biology in managing our state's wildlife, and safeguard our hunting heritage.

We express our gratitude to the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP or Department) and the FWP Commission (Commission) for the opportunity to comment on the proposed acquisition of 5,677 acres North of Ryegate in Golden Valley County to form the Big Snowy Wildlife Management Area (Big Snowy WMA). This is a historic opportunity to work with a willing landowner, utilize federal funding, and our state's best conservation tool, Habitat Montana.

MWF strongly recommends the adoption of **Alternative B: Proposed Action - For FWP to acquire the 5,677-acre property from Shodair Children's Hospital to create the Big Snowy Mountains WMA** for the following reasons:

- 1. Protects habitat.** This excerpt from the Department's summary says it all, "the proposed property is entirely native mountain/foothill and prairie grassland habitats at the base of the Big Snowy Mountains with no farmed or crop land. It provides habitat for a diverse assemblage of species, including elk, black bear, mule deer, pronghorn, and at least 22 animals listed as species of concern. It is beneficial in maintaining huntable and viewable populations of game and non-game species, both migratory and resident." Abundant and quality wildlife habitat is critical to keep wildlife on public land, ensure health and diversity within the population, and prevent overcrowding.
- 2. Improves access.** The acreage in the proposed acquisition is in an area with access challenges due to the nature of island range ownership, i.e., the private property

surrounding the mountain range and little public access. This acquisition will improve access to the public land and the elk herd, which is currently 900% over objective.

- 3. Supports agriculture and working ranches.** As part of the acquisition, FWP would honor an existing cattle grazing lease on the property, in place until 2031.
- 4. Broad support from Montanans and a willing seller.** This purchase has broad support from the public, both hunting and nonhunting. Montanans recognize the importance of protecting habitat for recreation and the environment and see this as an opportunity to permanently protect an area where public land is in short supply. Having a willing seller who sees the vision of preserving this landscape makes this project all the more worthy of support.
- 5. Utilizes federal and state dollars.** The state has a textbook opportunity to use Pittman-Robertson and Habitat Montana dollars, money expressly set aside by hunters, to accomplish purchases such as these. Given that the money is there and budgets are intact, the Department is in an excellent position to make this purchase.

In closing, MWF strongly recommends FWP adopt Alternative B, complete this acquisition, and improve habitat and access for wildlife and generations of Montanans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MS', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marcus Strange
Montana Wildlife Federation
Director of State Policy and Government Relations