



MONTANA FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: February 4, 2022

Agenda Item: Lower Yellowstone River Cracker Box Site Acquisition - Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background:

During the 2021 session, the Legislature pledged \$4 million for river access, habitat, & recreation projects on the Lower Yellowstone River between Hysham & the North Dakota border. Building on a local initiative, FWP convened a 12-member citizen advisory committee, sponsored by Gov. Gianforte, during the summer of 2021 to guide use of the \$4 million with an eye toward opportunities & recommendations for improved access, habitat conservation, & sustainable economic development along the corridor. The Committee was tasked with developing a scoring matrix for evaluating acquisition opportunities & identifying investments needed to maximize habitat conservation & protection while enhancing sustainable public access & recreational opportunities.

The committee submitted its recommendations to FWP in November. Among them was a recommendation to pursue acquisition of the Cracker Box property in Dawson County. The property provides access to approximately 20 acres of riparian habitat & is located between Fallon Bridge FAS & Black Bridge FAS. This reach of river was identified as a high-priority area for new acquisition & development by the committee due to a lack of access for approximately 30 miles. The Cracker Box acquisition would split this reach & provide access to anglers, boaters, floaters, & other recreationists. Development possibilities include an access road, parking area, boat ramp, designated camping, & latrine.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

The Lower Yellowstone River Coalition held multiple community listening sessions prior to the 2021 legislative session. The Lower Yellowstone River Corridor Advisory Committee held multiple public meetings between August & October 2021 & issued its recommendations in November 2021.

FWP would pursue formal public comment through the due diligence & development process if endorsed.

Alternatives & Analysis:

Potential alternatives will be identified & analyzed during due diligence & environmental review process.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

FWP recommends that the commission endorse efforts by the department to pursue acquiring the Cracker Box access site on the Lower Yellowstone River.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission authorize FWP to pursue negotiations with the landowners & initiate due diligence required for site acquisition & development of the Cracker Box property.