



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: June 22, 2022

Agenda Item: Willow Creek Fee Title Addition to Mt. Haggin WMA, Region 3

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 8 minutes

Background: The Willow Creek property is located approximately three miles southeast of Anaconda in Deer Lodge County. It consists of 829 acres of native grassland, shrubland, conifer forest, and riparian habitat. The property provides mule deer and elk winter range and pronghorn fawning and summer range. It contains one mile of Willow Creek where recent genetics data has confirmed the presence of pure strain westslope cutthroat trout and a potential bull trout reintroduction site. The property is bordered to the north by a subdivision. Given current interest in Montana real estate, the Willow Creek property is at risk of being subdivided. The property shares 2.5 miles of boundary with Mt. Haggin WMA and would extend the ecological benefits, habitat effectiveness, and access to land managed for fisheries, wildlife, and recreational opportunities.

Public Involvement Process & Results: In compliance with MEPA, FWP completed an environmental assessment for the proposed project. It was released for public comment Jan. 31-March 1, 2022. The public was notified of the proposed action through: an open house held in Butte on Feb. 8; two legal notices in Butte *Montana Standard*, *Anaconda Leader*, *Helena Independent Record*; a news release distributed to a standard list of media outlets interested in FWP Region 3 issues; notice of EA emailed, postal mailed, or in-person to neighboring landowners, Deer Lodge County officials, local conservation groups, and other interested parties, including over 250 parties on the Butte area wildlife biologist's distribution list; and public notice posted on FWP web page with the draft EA available and opportunity to submit comments online. Thirty-six parties submitted comments on the proposal. Thirty-three were in full support, two provided conditional support, and one party was opposed. A Decision Notice was released on March 8 that recommended proceeding with the acquisition.

Alternatives and Analysis: Two alternatives were analyzed: FWP's purchase of this 829-acre parcel in fee-title, or not to purchase it. If FWP were to pass on this opportunity, it is highly likely the property would be subdivided, which would greatly compromise the parcel's high conservation value and reduce the public's opportunity to recreate.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the commission approve this acquisition. Purchasing this property would ensure that Mt. Haggin WMA and this parcel would continue to serve the needs of wildlife and provide additional public access for hunting, fishing, and other recreation.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve FWP's purchase of the Willow Creek Addition to Mt. Haggin WMA.