



Region One  
490 North Meridian Road  
Kalispell, MT 59901

DECISION NOTICE  
and  
Finding of No Significant Impact  
for the  
**Danford Pond Proposed Wildlife Viewing Area Easement Acquisition**

July 6, 2022

#### Description of Proposed Project

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to acquire an Easement for Public Viewing Access and build an associated bird viewing area on the property at the corner of North Somers Road and Manning Road in Kalispell, Flathead County, Montana. The proposed viewing area will be within the existing 34-acre, Danford Conservation Easement and will provide viewing opportunity for wildlife species within and adjacent to Reed's Slough. The Easement for Public Viewing Access would be donated to FWP and does not require funding; however, the construction of the viewing area will be paid for by FWP.

#### Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Process and Public Involvement

FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for public review on June 10, 2022 and asked for public comment through July 5, 2022. FWP held a virtual public information meeting on June 21, 2021, at 6:00 p.m. FWP ran legal ads describing the proposed project, the availability of the draft EA, and the public hearing information in the *Flathead Beacon*, *Daily Inter Lake*, *The Hungry Horse News*, and *Helena Independent Record*. FWP also mailed postcards to neighboring landowners. The draft EA was posted on FWP's official website and was also available at the Region One headquarters in Kalispell and online for people with internet access or through internet service at public libraries.

The EA evaluated the potential impacts of the following alternatives:

1. **Alternative A: Proposed Action** Under the proposed action, FWP would acquire an Easement for Public Viewing at the described property and construct a parking area and associated bird viewing area that could be used by the public during the snow-free season. This viewing area would provide access for the public to safely enjoy bird watching at Reed's Slough. This viewing area would also provide a venue for school

groups to learn about the migratory waterfowl of Montana. Providing a parking area will mitigate traffic issues associated with bird watchers parking along North Somers Road.

2. **Alternative B: No Action** Under Alternative A, no action would be taken. The Danford Conservation Easement would continue to protect Reed's Slough for nesting and migratory waterfowl and other wetland species. People wishing to view birds in Reed's Slough would continue to park in the North Somers Road right-of-way posing a traffic hazard. There would be no venue to provide school groups an opportunity to view waterfowl on Reed's Slough, due to lack of parking facility.

### 3. Summary of Public Comment

FWP received 9 public comments with 7 of those in support of the acquisition of the viewing easement and 2 opposed. Below is a summary of questions and issues raised by commenters and FWP's response to each:

- One letter expressed general concern for development of the viewing area's potential impact on wildlife.

*FWP Response: We appreciate the resident's concern for wildlife in the Flathead Valley and the rapid loss of wildlife habitat that is occurring. It is our intent to develop the viewing area in a manner to mitigate negative impacts to wildlife within Reeds Slough. Many other viewing areas across Montana have been successful in providing viewing opportunities while minimizing impacts to the wildlife that use the areas. We hope that by providing a safe and educational place for residents and visitors to view wildlife at Reeds Slough, we can help increase appreciation and understanding of our local wildlife and its value to the overall ecosystem.*

- One letter expressed concern that the parking lot will become a spot for nefarious activities that will be disruptive to the adjacent neighbors. In addition, the parking lot will be in view of their house.

*FWP Response: We understand the concern for vagrancy at any public parking area and are sensitive to the fact that the lot will be in view of a residence. We do not anticipate a major increase in traffic stopping at the viewing area; however, we hope that schools will use the viewing area for education purposes, which would result in short times of increased activity at the location. FWP considered planting a vegetative barrier to screen the parking area; however, we feel that increasing the seclusion of the parking lot would potentially result in increased unauthorized activities. Currently, we do not plan on screening the parking lot from the street view. The parking lot itself will be large enough to accommodate a school bus, but small enough to limit unauthorized vehicle use. The parking lot and viewing area will be gated and closed during the winter to further help deter unauthorized activities. FWP Game Wardens will enforce all viewing area regulations and can be contacted if there are issues.*

- One letter encouraged FWP to include signs to ask viewers to be cautious about human noise and movements and to leave their pets in their vehicles or keep them on a short leash.

*FWP Response: We plan to install educational signage in the parking lot, along the path, and at the viewing area. These signs will include educational materials about avian ecology and the wetland ecosystem, as well as how to be respectful wildlife viewers. Pets will be required to be leashed.*

- One letter recommended if any restoration/replanting of the easement area is needed, that we plant native grasses, forbs, and shrubs.

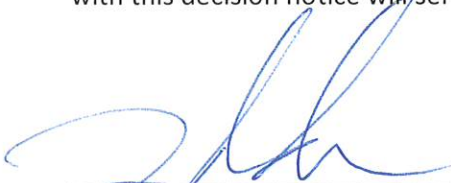
*FWP Response: While we do not anticipate needed to revegetate much of the area after construction, as the site is within an agricultural field, if we do any plantings, it will be with native flora.*


#### **FWP Recommended Alternative and Final Decision**

In reviewing all the public comment and other relevant information, and evaluating the environmental effects, I recommend that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the Alternative A, the Proposed Action.

Through the public review process described above, the public raised some minor issues/concerns with the project, but all have been addressed in this decision document. FWP found no significant impacts on the human or physical environments associated with this proposal; therefore, the EA is the appropriate level of analysis and an environmental impact statement is not required.

Noting and including the responses to public comments, the draft EA will become the final EA and together with this decision notice will serve as the final documents for this proposal.

  
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Lee Anderson  
Region One Supervisor

  
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Date