



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: Aug. 17, 2023

Agenda Item: Property Acquisition for a new Havre Field Office

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background: FWP has outgrown the capacity of its current field office location in Havre, which it currently leases. FWP was granted authority during the 2021 and 2023 legislative sessions for the acquisition or construction of a new Havre Field Office. FWP has reviewed numerous available listings of potentially suitable buildings and vacant land in the Havre area. All but this property exceeded fiscal responsibility or have proven otherwise infeasible. FWP is proposing to purchase the property located at 21 River Road in Havre, MT for the price of \$748,600. This property is 9.15 acres in size and is adjacent to the Milk River. The home, which will be remodeled to meet the needs of a working office and retail space, has a total of 3,212 sq. feet, two bathrooms, four bedrooms, a finished basement, and an attached two car garage. The property contains a shop that, once insulated and finished, will adequately meet maintenance needs, and provide additional office space. Also located on the property is a metal barn with a dirt floor that will provide covered storage for equipment. The size and layout of the property will allow for adequate public and staff parking, recreational vehicle and boat pass-through, ADA accessibility, and secured administrative and storage areas. Future conceptual plans for the property include opportunities for fishing and canoe access on the Milk River, a walking pathway for birding opportunities, and outdoor hunter education areas.

Public Involvement Process & Results: A public scoping meeting was held on May 1 to help inform the pending Draft Environmental Assessment (EA); no comments were received during public scoping. The Draft EA was made available for public review and comment from May 18, 2023, through June 1, 2023. A Legal Notice was published in the Havre Daily News on May 18, 2023, and the Draft EA was posted on FWP's Public Notice webpage: <https://fwp.mt.gov/news/public-notices>. The Draft EA was also made available for public review on the Environmental Quality Council website: <https://leg.mt.gov/mepa/search/>, by individual request, and through notice to identified interested parties. FWP held a public meeting regarding the Draft EA on May 25, and six members of the affected public were in attendance. FWP received four public comments during the public comment period. On June 5, 2023, FWP posted its Decision Notice to approve Alternative 2, the proposed action, which is to purchase the 21 River Road property.

To utilize the property as an office, the zoning must be changed from Agricultural to Residential II, and a conditional use permit must be obtained. The zoning change process began with a public meeting on May 3, 2023, after which the Hill County Planning Board recommended to the Hill County Commission that zoning be changed to allow the proposed field office project to proceed. A public hearing was held on July 13, 2023, where the County Commission tentatively approved the zoning amendment. On July 17, 2023, the County Commission published notice of its intent to approve the zoning amendment. Unless a protest of the zoning change is filed within 30 days of the public notice, the County Commission's approval is final. FWP will then seek a conditional use permit from the County Board of Adjustment for the day-to-day business activities that will occur at 21 River Road, which will include another public hearing.

Analysis & Alternatives: FWP in Region 6 has diligently analyzed real estate opportunities for a new Havre Field Office location. These opportunities have ranged from vacant lots with the intention to construct an office, to properties with existing infrastructure that needed significant updating, remodeling, or additional construction. The property presented for purchase is believed the best opportunity to meet the needs of the public and FWP, while making the most fiscal sense.

Alternative A: The commission approves FWP's purchase of 21 River Road in Havre, MT, for the purpose of a new field office. FWP would proceed to complete the rezoning process, seek a conditional use permit, finalize the purchase, and beginning contracting processes for remodeling and construction.

Alternative B: The commission could choose not to approve this purchase, and FWP will continue to seek a suitable property.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The department recommends the commission approve the purchase of the property at 21 River Road in Havre, MT as presented.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission authorize FWP to purchase the property at 21 River Road in Havre, Montana, contingent upon the Hill County Commission's approval of a request to amend the zoning from agricultural to residential II, and the Hill County Planning Board issuing a conditional use permit.