

Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA Antler hunting opener

BACKGROUND INFO ON SAFETY CONCERNS
+ NEXT STEPS



Western Montana's Blackfoot-clearwater Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is a popular destination for antler hunters when it opens for the season annually at 12 p.m. on May 15.



This year, due to human safety concerns with the increasing congestion and pedestrian traffic along highway 83, opening day antler hunters will need to access the area following a different process.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is looking for the public's help with filling in the details.



A tradition worth continuing with a new approach in the interest of human safety

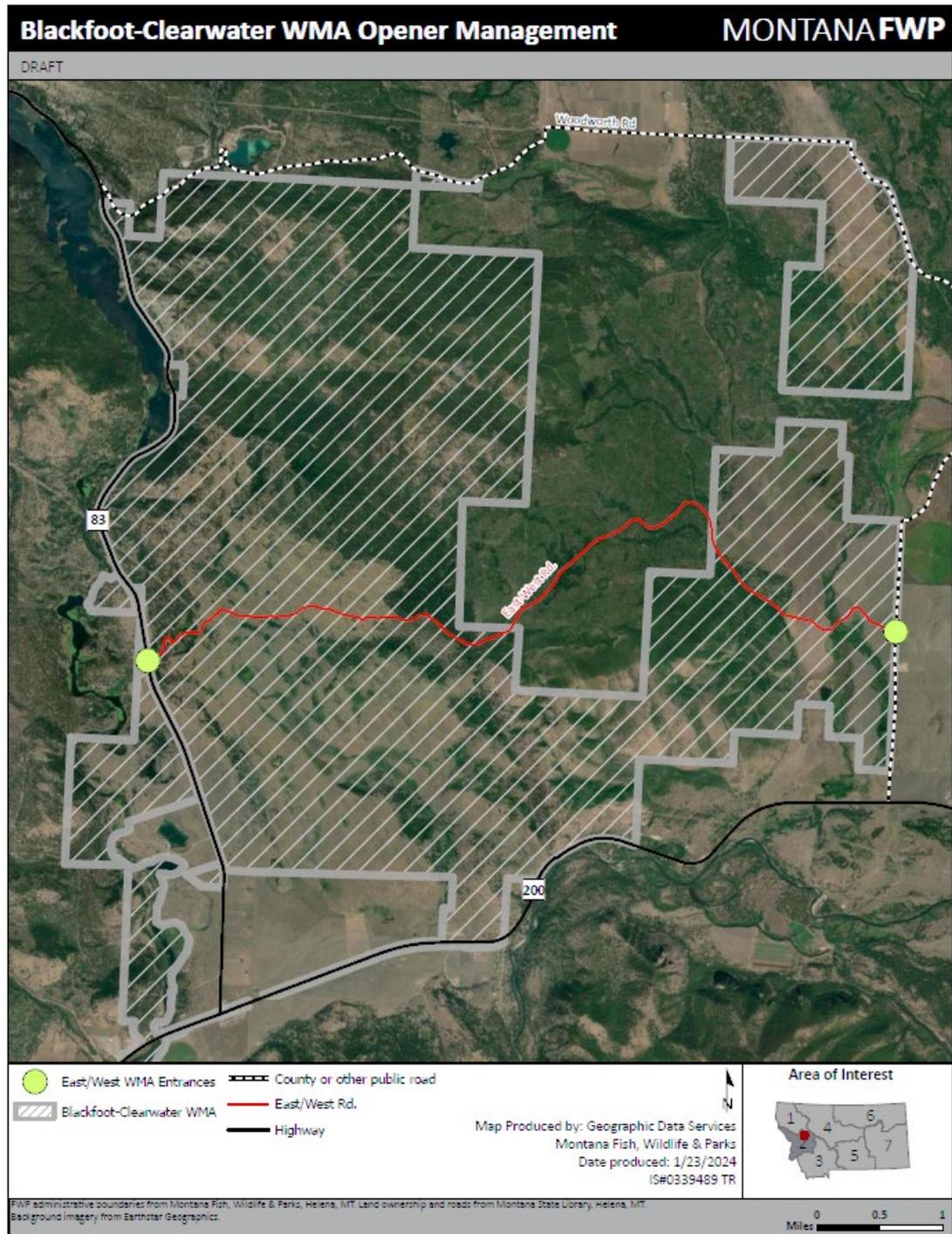
Shed hunting has long been a tradition on opening day on the WMA and its popularity has steadily increased over the years. FWP is not looking to limit the number of people that can access the WMA on opening day, but instead to find a way to improve public safety.



A successful shed hunter shows off their find on the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area in May 2023.

The Blackfoot Clearwater WMA is in the Blackfoot Valley near the junction of Hwy 83 and Hwy 200.

The two main entrances are on the east and west sides of the WMA. The west entrance is just off Hwy 83, and the east is off Woodworth Road.



The west entrance to the BCWMA is located along Highway 83:

Most of the vehicles that enter the WMA on opening day stage along the highway waiting to go in this entrance.

Most of the camping takes place across Highway 83 and to the south, which is contributing to the safety concerns as members of the public cross from campers to staged vehicles.



The east entrance to the Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA:

Woodworth Road is the eastern boundary of the WMA.

Although some people use the east entrance on opening day, currently most of the traffic enters from the west side mostly because it is closer to the portions of the WMA where more shed antlers tend to be found.



The congestion begins weeks ahead

Vehicles stage along the Highway 83 right of way before the May 15 opener. The first vehicles were noted as early as mid-April in 2023.



Camping is part of the tradition too

Campers stage along the west side of Highway 83. The main entrance is across the highway and off the frame to the left. This year we'll need to consider where camping can safely happen.





Pedestrians gather along Highway 83, causing concern for public safety for those waiting to enter the WMA and motorists. Last year, MT Highway Patrol had to shut down the highway just prior to opening time to help with safety concerns. This is not a long-term solution.



Pedestrians cross Highway 83 in advance of the noon opener in an area that has steady, fast vehicle traffic.

A line of vehicles enters the WMA off Hwy 83 as it opens at noon on May 15.

Typically, several hundred vehicles enter off Hwy 83 in a period of about 15-20 minutes.



We hope you'll help us fill in the details of the Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA opening day plan for 2024.

Attend the Feb. 15 meeting (online or in-person) or watch for updates online and provide your feedback.

