

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 14, 2013

Agenda Item: Proposed Haskill Basin CE

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorse Course of Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background

F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber Co. has offered to sell a conservation easement on 3,020 acres of commercial forest land in the headwaters of Haskill Creek. The project would be funded through the Forest Legacy Program, HCP Land Acquisition Program, a private landowner donation, and cash donations from other organizations. The property provides winter range for mule deer, white-tailed deer and moose. It is rated Class 1 for terrestrial species richness and provides important habitat for a variety of Tier I species. Haskill Creek supports a population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. The Iron Horse Subdivision, on the west boundary of the property, has been a hotspot for bear and lion conflicts since that land was developed. This project offers the opportunity to stop the spread of that human impact footprint. Both Iron Horse and the neighboring Whitefish Mountain Resort create an intense amount of high-end development pressure on the adjoining Stoltze property that was sustained through the recent recession. Stoltze's willingness to consider a conservation easement for this property offers an unprecedented opportunity to conserve important fish and wildlife habitat, stop expanded development, and sustain high levels of public recreation.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP is working closely with the Trust for Public Land to inform partners of this potential opportunity. Thus far there has been strong support with more than 17 organizations endorsing the project including the city of Whitefish which gets about 75 percent of its municipal water supply from water diversions on this property.

Alternatives and Analysis

FWP could decide not to pursue this conservation opportunity. The federal funding sources proposed for this project can only be granted to FWP, so there is no opportunity for other agencies or organizations to secure this property with a conservation easement. This property would likely be developed without a conservation easement because the owners currently receive about six calls per week expressing interest in buying some of this land, and demand for high-end development properties remains strong.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Because of the importance of conserving this land and the high resource values and public recreational opportunities just minutes from Whitefish, FWP recommends that the Commission endorse this proposed project so FWP may work to fully develop this opportunity.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission endorse FWP's proposal to negotiate for the purchase of the Haskill Basin conservation easement.