

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: January 9, 2014 **Agenda Item:** Lost River WMA Land Holding Adjustment

Division: Wildlife **Action Needed:** Endorsement to Proceed

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

The 2,992 acre Lost River Ranch Wildlife Management Area, 42 miles northwest of Havre along the U.S.-Canadian border, was purchased by FWP in 2012 using Habitat Montana funds. As FWP assumed ownership and began implementing management plans for the WMA, including public access, it's become apparent that there may be ways to improve management effectiveness and efficiency through better alignment of property boundaries. To that end, FWP is interested in exploring options with surrounding landowners—including private owners and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation—to address management and access concerns. Options may include fee title acquisitions (e.g., of inholdings), conservation easements, right-of-way easements, land exchanges, and short or long-term leases. FWP is seeking an endorsement to proceed from the Commission to pursue options with adjacent landowners to better align boundaries and address access and management effectiveness.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The purchase of this WMA underwent extensive public review during the acquisition phase, including written comments, comments provided at a public meeting in Havre, and comments provided to the Commission in December 2012. The Commission also hosted an open house meeting in Havre in June 2013 where the Lost River Ranch acquisition was widely discussed. Among the issues brought up during the public processes was concern about impacts to neighboring lands, public access to the WMA lands, and effective management of the WMA. If FWP proceeds with projects with an endorsement to proceed, the projects would get a full public review, including MEPA, final Commission approval, and Land Board approval, if needed.

Alternatives and Analysis

Alternatives include addressing the broader issues on a project by project basis or not proceeding with any additional effort in and adjacent to the Lost River WMA.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the Commission provide its endorsement to proceed, which would allow FWP to pursue potential acquisition/easement/lease options for addressing inholdings, access, impacts to neighboring landowners, and management effectiveness.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission endorse FWP's request to proceed to pursue potential acquisition/easement/exchange/lease options for addressing inholdings, access, impacts to neighboring landowners, and management effectiveness on and adjacent to the Lost River WMA.