

***FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** April 10, 2014

**Agenda Item:** Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area Addition

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

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**Background**

FWP requested federal aid dollars in 2010 under the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Services' Endangered Species Act "Recovery Land Acquisition" Habitat Conservation Plan program to purchase interest in land for grizzly bear habitat and species protection. The grant is specific to assisting the recovery effort of the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem grizzly bear population. This proposal is to secure approximately 320 acres from The Conservation Fund for \$345,000, which is 60 percent of the appraised value. The remaining 40 percent would be used as match for the grant.

FWP proposes to purchase in fee title approximately 320 acres immediately adjacent to the existing 10,397-acre Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area, west of Bynum. The land comprises grasslands intermixed with aspen, wetland and shrubland habitats, providing important year-round grizzly bear habitat, as well as winter range for elk and mule deer.

**Public Involvement Process & Results**

A final Environmental Assessment and Decision Notice have been completed and published, following requisite public involvement. Strong public support has been voiced for this proposal.

**Alternatives and Analysis**

Alternative A: No action. FWP would not purchase the property fee title. This would result in a loss of opportunity to protect and/or enhance critical native habitats for grizzly bears, elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer and other native species adjoining the Blackleaf WMA and associated recreational opportunity. With no action, the land would most likely be sold in the near future to landowners with potentially differing interests than the current landowners.

Alternative B: This preferred alternative is to purchase in fee title the addition to Blackleaf WMA.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:**

FWP recommends that the F&W Commission approve the purchase of this land as an addition to the Blackleaf WMA, protecting critical grizzly bear habitat, providing hunting and recreational opportunities, and expanding FWP's management to benefit affected wildlife populations.

**Proposed Motion**

I move the Commission approve purchase of the approximate 320-acre addition to Blackleaf WMA.