

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 10, 2014

Agenda Item: Farming lease renewals for Canyon Ferry Wildlife Management Area

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

The Canyon Ferry Wildlife Management Area is administered by FWP under the terms of a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for the operation and maintenance of the WMA.

This proposal is for the renewal of existing agricultural leases on the WMA, which are designed to produce agricultural crops and provide important wildlife habitat. There are six leases, which are solely hay and grain leases and one bee yard on the WMA. There are a total of 757 acres contained in the six leases of which, 648.2 acres are actually farmed by the lessee; 148.1 acres on these leases have been developed as wildlife cover; and 38.1 acres are set-aside grain left standing for wildlife, primarily upland game birds.

These agricultural leases have been in place for many years and are integrated with habitat enhancements on the WMA including wildlife nesting cover, shrub plantings, and food plots. This has been a very successful program for the lessees who produce a commodity and for the public that uses the area for wildlife viewing and hunting.

These leases are all cash leases that include discounts for work conducted to help develop wildlife cover and for set aside grain. Lease rates are based on private agricultural land averages as annually published by the Agricultural Statistics Service for this geographic area. The leases would be re-established for a five-year period (2014-2018).

Public Involvement Process & Results

An Environmental Assessment was written to address potential impacts of renewing the agricultural leases on Canyon Ferry WMA. The EA was announced in two newspapers and was out for a 14-day comment period, which was scheduled to end March 19. Public comments will be summarized in a Decision Notice and made available prior to Commission consideration.

Alternatives and Analysis

Under the "no action" alternative, the leases would not be renewed. FWP would be responsible for managing these cropland areas. However, FWP does not have the resources to take on those additional management responsibilities on the WMA. Renewing the leases enables local farmers to manage these croplands and surrounding wildlife habitat enhancements.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Approve renewal of these agricultural leases. The leases provide wildlife habitat in the form of agricultural fields and associated habitat enhancements. The leases also provide economic benefits to the lessees and the local community.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Commission approve renewal of the six agricultural leases on Canyon Ferry WMA for the period 2014-2018.