

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

**Meeting Date:** April 10, 2014

**Agenda Item:** Grazing Lease Extension – Vandalia Wildlife Management Area

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

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### **Background**

The Vandalia Wildlife Management Area is approximately 310 acres of property located 2.5 miles southeast of Hinsdale in Valley County. The property is administered by the Bureau of Reclamation and managed by FWP through a Memorandum of Understanding between the two agencies. FWP manages the property to benefit wildlife and provide recreational opportunities. The WMA consists of Milk River riparian, native mixed-grass prairie, and wetland habitats. The proposed action is to extend a grazing lease for three years on the WMA, which also incorporates 900 acres of adjacent private rangeland as part of a three-pasture rest-rotation grazing system. This system has been in place for 20 years. Grazed habitats provide attractive green up areas in the spring for deer and help keep vegetation in a productive condition for other wildlife.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

An Environmental Assessment was released March 11 for public comment period through March 31. The draft EA was made available to the public on the FWP website and an Interested Persons Letter was mailed to surrounding landowners, Valley County Commissioners, and other interested agencies and individuals, informing them of the proposed action and how they could obtain copies of the EA and provide comments. Public notices regarding the EA were also published in both the Glasgow Courier and Phillips County News. A summary of public comments will be included in the Decision Notice in advance of Commission consideration.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

The proposed alternative is to extend the grazing lease for three years. Grazing would continue under the historic stocking rate, continuing the rest-rotation grazing system. During this extension, the management plan for the WMA will be updated and the management objectives and grazing practices will be evaluated. The rest-rotation grazing system provides a mosaic of vegetation heights and structures needed by the variety of wildlife species found on the WMA.

If the grazing lease is not extended, there would be no grazing on the Vandalia WMA in 2014. The management plan for this WMA would be completed in 2015. Future grazing on the WMA would be evaluated based on the management objectives outlined in the WMA's management plan.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends extending the grazing lease for the Vandalia WMA for an additional three years.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move that the Commission approve the extension of the Vandalia WMA grazing lease.