

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 10, 2014

Agenda Item: Land Exchange with DNRC on Wildlife Management Areas

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement to Proceed

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

DNRC Trust Lands are intermingled with many of FWP's Wildlife Management Areas. The different agency missions and associated land management direction have been cause for ongoing issues, affecting the integrity of these WMAs. As well, lease fees paid by FWP to DNRC continue to increase. The long term solution is for FWP to fully incorporate priority DNRC lands into FWP ownership, to be managed as WMA lands. Accomplishing this would involve multiple individual transactions using one or more of the following options: direct purchase; land exchanges involving outside lands that DNRC has identified for acquisition; and direct agency to agency exchanges. Each individual transaction would be presented to the Fish and Wildlife Commission for final approval. Acquisition costs for acquiring DNRC lands would be funded primarily with Pittman Robertson dollars and matched by Habitat Montana and other possible funding sources. FWP has been working with DNRC on this general proposal and both agencies recognize the considerable benefits to the public, habitat, resource, and Trust Lands of consolidating ownerships.

Public Involvement Process & Results

There has been no public involvement at this time. Upon endorsement by the FW Commission, FWP will work with DNRC to obtain public input on individual projects and to fulfill other land acquisition process requirements.

Alternatives and Analysis

FWP and DNRC could set aside this current opportunity for consolidating lands. Under this alternative, FWP would continue to pay lease fees on these parcels (currently costing approximately \$50,000/year), managing them as WMA lands. Ongoing issues related to grazing leases, winter range seasonal use restrictions, and long term management direction, including the potential for the lease or sale of DNRC lands to third parties will continue to arise.

Pittman Robertson funding and strong support of DNRC embody a unique opportunity to "strike while the iron is hot." Consolidating lands supports both agencies' missions and provides substantial long term benefit to the public.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends acquiring up to 18,000 acres of priority DNRC lands that are within Wildlife Management Area boundaries. Owning and managing these parcels as part of the WMAs will help assure habitat values and applied management are consistent and secure into the future.

Proposed Motion

I move the F&W Commission endorse FWP working with DNRC on acquiring up to 18,000 acres of priority DNRC lands within Wildlife Management Area boundaries.