

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 26, 2014

Agenda Item: Otter Island Fisheries Conservation Area Additions - Land Acquisitions

Division: Fisheries

Action Needed: Final Action

Time Needed for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

On June 14, 2012, the F&W Commission endorsed FWP's request to evaluate four parcels along the upper Flathead River for potential purchase, including two located just south of Otter Island Fisheries Conservation Area (FCA). FWP now proposes to acquire these two parcels that total 19.72 acres. If acquired, these parcels will be added to the existing Otter Island FCA that is located along the west side of the mainstem Flathead River, about 1.5 miles east of downtown Kalispell. The purpose of the proposed acquisitions is to expand protection of riparian and wetland habitats along the Flathead River mainstem, islands, and side channels for the benefit of fish and wildlife species. The additions would be purchased for below appraised value (Addition #1 \$108,800 and Addition #2 for \$48,960, for a combined total of \$157,760) using fisheries mitigation funds from the Bonneville Power Administration to help offset the fishery impacts due to inundation of the lands behind Hungry Horse Dam. The parcels would be managed primarily for their habitat values and dispersed public recreation as part of FWP's Otter Island FCA and guided by the revised Otter Island FCA Management Plan. If completed, the acquisition of these properties would complete 2.5 miles of connected public land ownerships along the west side of the Flathead River mainstem from the north end of Old Steel Bridge FAS to the south end of DNRC's Owen Sowerwine Natural Area.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP issued its draft environmental assessment for a 21-day public review on July 9. FWP notified the public about the land acquisitions and associated management plan through legal ads, press releases, and emails/letters to all adjoining landowners and other interested parties. FWP received seven comments supporting the proposed project and none against.

Alternatives and Analysis

The EA considered the no-action alternative, under which the private landowners would continue to own these properties. Since both landowners are interested in selling their properties, the parcels would most likely be sold on the private market and possibly developed. The EA identified the benefits to riparian and wetland habitat as well as public recreation opportunities of FWP ownership of these parcel, and did not find any significant negative impacts associated with proceeding with the proposed action.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the Commission approve the project as proposed in the Final EA and Decision Notice. These additions to Otter Island FCA will secure and protect fish and wildlife habitat along the Flathead River, consolidate FWP ownership in the Otter Island-Old Steel Bridge area, improve management and enforcement efficiencies, and maintain public access for 2.5 miles along the western bank of the Flathead River.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission approve FWP's fee acquisitions of the Otter Island Fisheries Conservation Area Addition #1 and Otter Island Fisheries Conservation Area Addition #2, as described in the July 31 Decision Notice.