

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: October 16, 2014

Agenda Item: Garrity WMA Addition

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 minutes

Background

FWP proposes fee-title purchase of 640 acres adjoining the Garrity Mountain WMA that includes elk winter range and calving habitat and an extensive aspen stand. These habitats, in combination with grasslands and riparian areas, provide for a diversity of wildlife including up to 24 Montana Species of Concern and Potential Species of Concern. The property, currently owned by The Conservation Fund, would be bought for \$1.38 million (funded by the Natural Resource Damage Program \$1.28 million, the Montana Fish & Wildlife Conservation Trust \$50,000, and FWP's Habitat Montana Program \$50,000). In addition, NRDP would provide \$80,000 for operations and maintenance costs incurred during the first five years of FWP ownership. This land would be managed as part of Garrity WMA.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP completed an environmental assessment to analyze potential impacts associated with purchase of the property and managing the property in perpetuity. This EA was available for public comment Aug. 1—Sept. 2 with a public hearing held in Anaconda on Aug. 14. No significant adverse impacts were identified by FWP or the public. In total 20 respondents—16 parties (14 people, the Anaconda Sportsmen's Club, and the Pintler-Ranger District, USFS)—were in favor of the acquisition, three did not specifically support or oppose it, and one was supportive contingent on allowing wolf trapping on the WMA (which was outside the scope of our analysis). Public input, in particular from Anaconda, was strongly favorable and demonstrated the value that residents place on wildlife habitat, access, and outdoor recreation in general and specifically securing habitat and recreational opportunities on the proposed Garrity addition.

Alternatives and Analysis

The alternatives considered were "no action" and "purchase of a conservation easement". The "no action" alternative would not bring the property into public ownership and not meet FWP's objectives. The conservation easement alternative was considered, but dismissed from analysis because the owner is not interested in the donation or sale of a conservation easement.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends approval by the F&W Commission to purchase the 640 acre addition to Garrity Mountain WMA. This acquisition, which received strong public support, would conserve high value wildlife habitat and allow for public access to hunting and other non-motorized recreational uses of previously inaccessible land. The purchase represents an extraordinary opportunity for FWP to work collaboratively with NRDP, TCF, and the Montana Fish & Wildlife Conservation Trust to conserve and protect elk and other wildlife habitat and provide recreational opportunities to the public within sight of Anaconda.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Fish & Wildlife Commission approve FWP's recommendation to purchase 640 acres adjacent to the Garrity Mountain WMA.