

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 15, 2015

Agenda Item: Threemile WMA Forest Treatment Project

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP proposed to thin up to 400 acres of forest on the Threemile Wildlife Management Area in Ravalli County. If approved by the Commission, the work would begin as early as June 2015 and extend into the winter of 2015-16. The purpose is to conserve and improve wildlife habitat on the WMA. FWP anticipates that important ungulate winter range condition would improve due to increased grass and woody browse understory recruitment, and aspen stands will benefit from the removal of encroaching conifers. Treatment would also reduce the risk of high-intensity, stand replacement fire events that would remove the remnant large overstory trees, damage thin organic soils, slow grass and woody browse recruitment, and pose a significant risk to neighboring landowners.

The cost of the forest-habitat restoration treatments are expected to be covered by the sale of merchantable timber byproduct. Any revenue in excess of project costs will be deposited into the legislatively-established FWP Forest Management Account to implement further forest management projects pursuant to the provisions of 87-1-201(9)(a)(iv).

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP released a draft environmental assessment for public review on Feb. 9 and accepted public comment through March 10. The opportunity for comment was well publicized. FWP received three responses, including two comments in support and none in opposition to the proposed project.

Alternatives and Analysis

No action would result in a continuing high risk of stand-replacing wildfire, which would eventually contribute to a greater and longer loss of wildlife habitat following a fire event. A variety of alternative forest-management prescriptions are possible and were not analyzed here because this is a relatively small-scale demonstration project. The results would be expected to be visible in 2016 and the subsequent evaluation would guide any additional treatment proposal on Threemile WMA.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the Commission approve the forest treatment. The project has so far benefited from the involvement and guidance of professional service foresters from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. That partnership would continue to ensure that prescriptions are followed.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission approve FWP's proposal to conduct forest treatments on up to 400 acres of habitat on Threemile WMA.