

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

**Meeting Date:** April 15, 2015

**Agenda Item:** 2015 Grazing and Sharecrop Leases – Beckman WMA Grazing Lease

**Division:** Wildlife **Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

### **Background**

FWP proposes to renew a cooperative grazing lease on 4,921 acres of the Beckman Wildlife Management Area and adjoining 2,695 acres of the Roe Ranch, northeast of Denton. This lease agreement would continue the use of prescriptive livestock grazing as a habitat management tool on the WMA while positively influencing privately-managed wildlife habitat.

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

FWP released a draft environmental assessment for public review on Jan. 27 and accepted public comment until Feb. 26. Notice of the proposal and availability of the draft EA was published in the *Lewistown News Argus* and *Great Falls Tribune*. Copies of the draft EA were distributed to neighboring landowners and interested individuals, groups, and agencies to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project. The EA was also available for public review on FWP's website. FWP received one comment, which was in opposition to the proposal. The comment is addressed in the decision notice.

### **Alternatives and Analysis:**

Under the no action alternative, the grazing lease would not be extended and no livestock grazing would occur on the Beckman WMA. The Roe Ranch would change its ranch operations again, which could include returning to season-long grazing and increasing grazing intensity, ultimately deteriorating habitat values for wildlife. The Roe Ranch may also remove free public hunting access on the property. In addition, there would be increased maintenance costs to FWP related to monitoring the boundary fences, as the grazing system infrastructure is currently monitored by the lessee.

Under the proposed alternative, the grazing lease would be extended for an additional three years. Grazing treatments, including seasonal deferral and year-long rest, would continue to be prescribed across all affected properties to facilitate plant root development and maintenance, as well as seedling establishment of desirable plant species. There would be some continued maintenance costs related to monitoring grazing and maintaining cross fencing on the WMA if the grazing lease is renewed. Maintenance would continue to be provided by the lessee. Free public hunting would also continue on the Roe Ranch, better facilitating wildlife management in the area.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends final approval of the Beckman WMA-Roe Ranch cooperative grazing lease renewal. The renewal reflects a continuation of past practices.

### **Proposed Motion:**

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission approve renewal of the Beckman WMA-Roe Ranch cooperative grazing lease for the years 2015 through 2017.