

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 15, 2015

Agenda Item: 2015 Grazing and Sharecrop Leases –Elk Island Farming Lease

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background

Elk Island Wildlife Management Area was purchased by FWP to maintain a woodland/cropland complex to benefit a diversity of wildlife while maximizing hunting opportunities, primarily for white-tailed deer and pheasants. The proposed action is to initiate a share-crop agreement on 36.5 acres of the WMA that was purchased and added to it 2014 (Jorgenson Purchase). This two year lease is in addition to other agricultural ground on the WMA–152 acres–that is currently in the second year of a three-year lease, approved by the Commission in 2014. The lessee would cultivate and retain a portion of the hay/grain crop harvest (75 percent), leaving the remaining crop (25 percent) standing for wildlife use during winter months. The benefit and purpose of the lease is to provide winter habitat and forage, primarily for wintering pheasants, deer, and turkeys. Standing crops also benefit migrating waterfowl and a variety of other wildlife. The WMA is open to public hunting during all Commission-approved seasons, providing opportunity for deer, upland game bird, and waterfowl hunting.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

The environmental assessment for the project was released on Jan. 21, with comments accepted through Feb. 11. FWP received no comments on the proposed lease. FWP issued its decision notice on Feb. 13 in support of the agricultural lease, contingent on Commission approval.

Alternatives and Analysis:

Under the no action alternative, agricultural lands would not be cultivated and FWP would need to commit resources to manage weeds on the previously cultivated 36.5 acres of farm fields. Wildlife would be negatively impacted by lack of wintering habitat and forage resources. Renewing the agricultural lease would benefit wildlife by providing high-quality forage and wintering habitat and continued hunting opportunity for deer and pheasants with little expense to FWP.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

FWP recommends that the Commission approve the agricultural lease on Elk Island WMA, which would provide necessary winter forage for wildlife and promote quality hunting opportunities for sportsmen.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission approve the agricultural lease on Elk Island WMA.