

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: May 14, 2015

Agenda Item: Musselshell River Fishing Access Site

Division: Fisheries

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background

FWP is seeking Commission approval to conduct due diligence toward potentially acquiring a fishing access site on the Musselshell River near the town of Musselshell in Musselshell County. This site is located approximately 24 miles east of Roundup. This site has been privately owned but accessed by anglers for many years. The landowner is interested in selling land for a formal fishing access site. An irrigation district has an easement for the diversion and canal and is willing to work with FWP to improve public access and safety. A fence and gate put in place by the irrigation district blocks access that was open. The irrigation district closed the area for safety concerns of people around the canal headworks. This project could include a site 25 acres or smaller with as much as $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile of river access. The closest Fishing Access Site on the Musselshell River is 90 miles upstream in Harlowton.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP has conducted the following:

- September 2013—landowner approached FWP about the possibility of FAS at the diversion.
- December 2014—met with landowner and irrigation district representative at the site.
- FWP has received public requests for several years asking for this site to be developed and opened to the public.
- November 2014-present—FWP has discussed ways to provide safe access with the irrigation representative.
- April 2015—FWP presented idea to the Musselshell Water Coalition during the regular meeting.

FWP would prepare an environmental assessment and seek public comment on acquiring the site, if approved.

Alternatives & Analysis

FWP could negotiate a Private Lands Fishing Access agreement with the landowner, although the landowner and irrigation district representative have expressed interest in a permanent solution. Some agreement with Musselshell County may arise as its park (which has camping and an outhouse) is adjacent to the proposed site. It is likely FAS users would use the park area too.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the Commission endorse its request to conduct due diligence toward potential purchase of the property. This would include negotiating with the landowner to secure acreage for parking, bank fishing access, and potential development for small water craft use. FWP would also consult with Musselshell County to address any park-use concerns and with the irrigation district for safety concerns.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission endorse FWP's request to negotiate the acquisition of a fishing access site on the Musselshell River near the town of Musselshell.