

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: May 14, 2015

Agenda Item: Trumbull Creek Conservation Easement (R1)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background

F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber Co. has offered to sell a conservation easement on 7,150 acres of commercial forest land along Trumbull Creek. This is in addition to the neighboring 3,020 acre Haskill Basin conservation easement project that received Commission endorsement in November 2013. This project would be funded through the Forest Legacy Program, HCP Land Acquisition Program, a private landowner donation, and cash donations from other organizations or other federal sources. The property provides winter range for mule deer, white-tailed deer and moose. It is rated Class 1 for terrestrial species richness and provides important habitat for a variety of Tier I species. The property includes 1.5 miles along South Canyon Creek which supports a population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. Located in the back yard of Columbia Falls, and with a road that accesses Forest Service lands in the North Fork of the Flathead River, the property receives substantial levels of public use for hunting, fishing, trapping and many other outdoor activities. Stoltze's willingness to consider a conservation easement for this property offers an unprecedented opportunity to conserve important fish and wildlife habitat, prevent expanded development, and sustain high levels of public recreation.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP is working closely with the Trust for Public Land to inform partners of this potential opportunity. Thus far there has been strong support with more than 24 organizations endorsing the project in addition to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The project has also been presented to the Columbia Falls City Council and was endorsed by one of the council members who was a former FWP Citizen Advisory Committee member.

Alternatives and Analysis

FWP could decide not to pursue this conservation opportunity. The federal funding sources proposed for this project can only be granted to FWP, so there is no opportunity for other agencies or organizations to secure this property with a conservation easement. This property would likely be developed without a conservation easement because the owners receive regular calls from people interested in buying acreage to build a home or subdivide.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Because of the importance of conserving this land and the high resource values and public recreational opportunities just minutes from Columbia Falls, FWP recommends that the Commission endorse this proposed project so FWP may work to fully develop this opportunity.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission endorse FWP's proposal to negotiate for the purchase of the Trumbull Creek conservation easement.