

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: May 14, 2015

Agenda Item: North Shore WMA Additions (R1)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background

FWP proposes to purchase three different parcels totaling about 139 acres that are next or close to FWP's North Shore State Park/North Shore WMA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Flathead Lake Waterfowl Production Area (WPA). The properties contain agricultural lands, wetlands, and portions of old river channels that provide valuable habitat for migratory waterfowl and upland game birds along the north shore of Flathead Lake. These lands are mostly in crop/hay production with no residences, but Parcel 1 includes a pole shed. Given their location, the parcels are at risk of being developed, directly affecting adjacent conserved lands. The landowners are motivated to sell their interests to FWP so that the conservation/habitat values of these lands can be protected and managed for wildlife and fisheries habitat. Under this proposal, these parcels would be added to the existing North Shore WMA, allowing for future wetland and upland habitat restoration, continued agricultural land uses, and public hunting/wildlife viewing opportunities. Funding could be from Pittman Robertson, Habitat Montana, and Bonneville Power Administration fisheries mitigation funds.

Public Involvement Process & Results

These potential projects have been evaluated and prioritized by the members of the Flathead River to Lake Initiative who include representatives of federal, state, and local agencies, non-profit organizations, and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The Initiative's goal is to conserve lands along the Flathead River as well as the undeveloped north shore of Flathead Lake for public, habitat, and water quality benefits. In addition, the public has strongly supported FWP's strategic acquisitions of land along Flathead Lake's north shore that began with the 162-acre North Shore State Park/WMA in 2008, the 70-acre Osprey View Fisheries Conservation Area (near Bigfork) in 2010; and the 189-acre North Shore WMA in 2014.

Alternatives and Analysis

If FWP is unable to acquire these parcels, the owners plan to initiate efforts to sell these lands on the open market. None are interested in a conservation easement. The owners of the 76-acre parcel to the east bought it about 10 years ago to prevent development. The two west parcels, totaling 62 acres, were inherited by two brothers who support FWP's North Shore WMA. Due to the exceptional views, wildlife values, and adjacent protected public lands, these parcels would be desirable for private purchase as recreational estate properties or subdivisions.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Because of the importance of this landscape for migratory and upland game birds, the need for additional public hunting/access, strong public support, and the availability of funding, FWP recommends that the Commission endorse this proposal.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission endorse these additions to North Shore Wildlife Management Area, allowing FWP to initiate negotiations and to conduct analysis and associated public review.