

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

**Meeting Date:** October 8, 2015

**Agenda Item:** Potential Lease from The City of Stevensville for Fishing Access Site (Bitterroot River)

**Division:** Fisheries

**Action Needed:** Endorsement

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 15 minutes

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## **Background**

FWP has been interested in developing a fishing access site in the Stevensville area on the Bitterroot River for many years. At present, this area does not have publically owned boat access to the Bitterroot River of any kind. The access sites nearest to Stevensville are Bell Crossing Fishing Access Site (FAS) – seven miles south; and Florence Bridge FAS – 10.5 miles to the north. The public launches boats from a pioneered site near the Stevensville Bridge. Ownership of the property and its precise boundaries were undetermined until a recent survey completed at the request of Roy Capp, a local resident and ranch owner. The survey indicated that Mr. Capp is owner of the property. The property involves fewer than five acres.

Mr. Capp is interested in a land exchange with the Town of Stevensville: Mr. Capp would receive acreage owned by the town adjoining his ranch, and the town would acquire the property currently used for river access. The town is interested in the possibility of an exchange and feels the community would benefit economically and recreationally if the pioneered access could become a publically owned site. The town does not have staff or funding to build or maintain a fully functional access site, but is interested in partnering with FWP. In this scenario, the town would own the site and FWP would develop and maintain a FAS under a long-term lease agreement. If an exchange between Mr. Capp and the town does not happen, FWP would also be interested in alternative arrangements directly with Mr. Capp in order to develop the site.

## **Public Involvement Process & Results**

Pending Commission endorsement, FWP would initiate due diligence towards developing an FAS including negotiations with Mr. Capp and the Town of Stevensville, and public involvement throughout the process.

## **Alternatives & Analysis**

The Commission could choose not to endorse FWP involvement in this negotiation. Mr. Capp has indicated he wants the site to be publically owned, but he does not want to be privately responsible for public access to the river. The town has indicated that it is not in a position to build or maintain a FAS. If the site were not available to the public, there is potential to leave a 17.5 mile reach of the Bitterroot River without a public launch. Alternatively, the Commission could endorse FWP involvement and due diligence by which public access could be improved within this river reach.

## **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends that the Commission endorse further negotiation by FWP. Discussions would continue toward the goal of a establishing a FAS on a key reach of the Bitterroot River.

## **Proposed Motion**

I move that the Commission endorse further due diligence towards establishing an FWP-managed FAS near Stevensville.