

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 12, 2015

Agenda Item: Wall Creek Wildlife Management Area Fee Title Addition

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background and Proposed Action

FWP proposes proceeding with the purchase of approximately 631 acres of land adjacent to Wall Creek Wildlife Management Area (WCWMA). The Fish and Wildlife Commission endorsed this project in October 2013. Currently owned by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), the parcel lies along the northern boundary of WCWMA. The land provides important elk winter range and would be managed as part of the WMA. The land comprises native grassland and a 10-acre developed site which includes 2 outbuildings, and a 2-acre pond. Upon purchase, the outbuildings would remain for administrative use and the pond site would be rehabilitated.

Public Involvement Process & Results

An Environmental Assessment was completed by FWP and released for public comment from September 15, 2015 to October 15, 2015. Legal notices were printed in the *Bozeman Daily Chronicle* and *The Madisionian* newspapers. The EA was also posted on the FWP webpage and at the FWP headquarters in Bozeman. A public meeting was held in Ennis on October 1. Five private parties and one agency submitted written comments. All comments favored Alternative, B to FWP purchasing the lands and adding them to WCWMA. One party asked questions about the process, but indicated no opinion toward either alternative.

Alternatives and Analysis

The following 2 alternatives were considered in the Environmental Assessment:

- Alternative A: No action – RMEF would seek another buyer for this property.
- Alternative B: FWP purchases the property, adding it to WCWMA.

Under Alternative A, RMEF would seek another buyer. Depending on the desires of the new owner, the habitat and wildlife values of the property may change. Public recreation access to the property could be lost, benefit to wildlife management could be negated, and conflicts could arise.

Under Alternative B, substantial benefits are expected, with no negative effects foreseen. Benefits would include enhanced wildlife habitat, conserved ungulate winter range that is contiguous with the WMA. The parcel abuts both WMA and BLM lands (see map) and would provide additional opportunities for public hunting and other compatible recreation. The proposed action is not expected to have significant adverse effects. Standard boundary signing, reclamation of the developed site, and ongoing maintenance to bring the parcel up to WMA maintenance standards will be necessary.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the Commission approve the purchase of this parcel as an addition to Wall Creek WMA. The purchase will improve and maintain valuable habitat for the benefit of wildlife and the public.

Proposed Motion

I move the Commission approve the purchase of the Wall Creek WMA addition.