

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: May 12, 2016

Agenda Item: Sun River, Blackleaf, and Beartooth WMA Inholding Acquisitions (R4)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 Min

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Background (Brief description of the issue, decision to be made, history, etc.):

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to purchase by fee title 9,488.26 acres of Trust Lands managed by the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) identified as inholdings on three FWP Wildlife Management Areas (WMA's). Those WMA's are the Sun River, Beartooth and Blackleaf and are located in Lewis & Clark, Cascade/Lewis & Clark, and Teton counties, respectively. The number of acres to be purchased in each WMA, respectively, is: 3,410.35; 5,438.43 and 639.48. Total appraised value for these acres combined is \$11,146,000. Individually, the three WMA's acreage appraised as \$6,252,000; 4,039,000; and \$855,000, respectively.

Public Involvement Process & Results

MFWP released a Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for public review of this proposal on March 4, 2016 and accepted public comment until April 8, 2016. That action was preceded by a public scoping effort in May and June of 2015. Copies of the Draft EA were distributed to neighboring landowners and interested individuals, groups, and agencies to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project. The EA was also available for public review on FWP's web site (<http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/>). MFWP received 72 comments (67 support; 5 opposed). Those comments revealed no new information or cause for alteration of information contained within the EA.

Alternatives and Analysis

Under a No Action alternative, acquisition of these acres on the Sun River, Beartooth and Blackleaf WMAs would not occur. These same acres would continue to be leased according to DNRC standards, practices and (increasing) rental rates.

Under the Proposed alternative, FWP would move forward with its intent to purchase 9,488 acres according to established DNRC policy and procedure. That DNRC procedure includes well-defined steps whereby a Land Banking auction for these lands on a county by county (not WMA by WMA) basis will be conducted. As the lessee and nominator of the sale parcels, FWP is afforded the ability to stop the sale process up to ten days before the auction occurs. Any parties wishing to bid on the sale parcels at the Land Banking auction must submit a bid deposit of 20% of the minimum bid price, 20 days before the auction.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends final Commission approval of the acquisition of DNRC inholdings on Sun River, Beartooth and Blackleaf WMAs

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve acquisition of DNRC inholdings on the Sun River, Beartooth and Blackleaf WMAs.