

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: April 14, 2017

Agenda Item: Grazing Lease Renewal on Vandalia Wildlife Management Area (R6)

Division: Wildlife **Action Needed:** Final

Time for this Presentation: 10 Min

Background

The Vandalia Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is a 310-acre property along the Milk River, 2.5 miles southeast of Hinsdale in Valley County. The property is owned by the Bureau of Reclamation, but managed by FWP to benefit wildlife and provide recreational opportunities. The WMA consists of riparian, native mixed-grass prairie, and wetland habitats. The WMA, along with an adjacent 900 acres of private rangeland, has been grazed under a 3-pasture rest-rotation system for the past 23 years. The proposed maximum stocking rate is 185 Animal Unit Months and the grazing period is from May 15 to September 15. The purpose of the grazing system is to improve grazing management across a larger area, beyond the WMA, to provide improved spring green-up conditions for deer, and to leave undisturbed cover for the benefit of nesting, hiding, forage, and other habitat values.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The comment period for the draft environmental assessment (EA) period was February 15 through March 14,. The draft EA was made available to the public on the FWP website and an Interested Persons Letter was sent to surrounding landowners, Valley County Commissioners, and other interested agencies and individuals letting them know how they could obtain copies of the EA and provide comments. There were two public notices of the EA availability and opportunity for public comment in both the Glasgow Courier and Phillips County News.

The Bureau of Reclamation submitted the only public comment on the EA, in which minor errors to the legal description were noted.

Alternatives and Analysis

The proposed alternative is to renew the grazing lease for seven years until September 15, 2023. Grazing would continue under the proposed stocking rate and rest-rotation grazing system. Under the proposed action, FWP would monitor the grazing system to ensure the grazing schedule is followed and that the grazing system meets intended purposes. There were no significant negative impacts of the proposed action identified during the drafting of the environmental assessment. The rest-rotation grazing system provides a mosaic of vegetation heights and structures needed by the variety of wildlife species found on the WMA.

If the grazing lease is not renewed, there would be no grazing on the Vandalia WMA in 2017.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends renewing the grazing lease for the Vandalia WMA for an additional seven years.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the renewal of the Vandalia WMA grazing lease as proposed.