

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: June 7, 2017

Agenda Item: Beartooth Wildlife Management Area Grazing Lease (R4)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP is proposing to renew an expiring livestock grazing lease on portions of the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area for one year (2018). Principles of rest-rotation grazing would continue to be used to maintain and/or enhance wildlife habitat for the resource and public benefit. Specifically, this grazing lease is designed to maintain and improve productive forage and cover diversity. The Polloch Meadows pasture is predominantly brome grass, which is more attractive to elk and deer after a cattle grazing treatment. The second pasture, known as Upper Cottonwood is part of the grazing rotation, providing forage and cover diversity on native vegetation within the WMA. Both pastures combined, the lease totals 875 acres on the WMA. This lease is one of two long-standing grazing leases with Sieben Live Stock, the second involving 4,575 acres on the BTWMA as well as additional lands off the WMA. This proposed one-year extension will align both leases on the same renewal schedule, allowing one environmental analysis and public review process, providing efficiency for staff and interested stakeholders.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The proposed lease extension was available for public comment from April 3-24, 2017. Solicitation of public input resulted in receipt of 3 comments (3 positive). All comments were received as e-mail responses coming from one organized group (Russell Country Sportsmen Association) and two private individuals.

Alternatives and Analysis

1. No action (no grazing lease) alternative:

- Forage conditions on Polloch Meadows will deteriorate and overall forage and cover diversity will be reduced on the WMA.
- Elk will likely use adjacent land forage in large numbers during the winter and spring time periods, some of which is private lands.

2. Proposed action (renew grazing lease) alternative:

- Reduction in residual vegetation, which in turn improves forage conditions and provides more diverse cover, particularly for species attracted to lighter cover.
- Soil and plant disturbance that will benefit seedling establishment of both desirable and possibly undesirable plant species.
- Provide for better fall and/or spring green-up vegetation for elk, mule deer and other wildlife species, thereby reducing elk usage of adjacent private property during the winter and spring.
- Promote improved plant production and vigor.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

Approve the 1-year grazing lease with Sieben Live Stock. FWP believes the action will help maintain forage and cover conditions for game and many nongame species. The system will continue to be monitored to detect any negative impacts to native vegetation.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission renew the livestock grazing lease with Sieben Live Stock for one year on the Polloch Meadows and Upper Cottonwood portions of the Beartooth Wildlife Management Area, totaling about 875 acres.