

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 7, 2017

Agenda Item: Lone Tree Conservation Easement (R6)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 Min

Background:

The proposed Lone Tree conservation easement (CE) consists of approximately 11,200 acres of deeded property located in the Missouri River Breaks adjacent to the Upper Missouri River Breaks National Monument. It consists of three larger parcels (~10,900 acres) and one smaller parcel (320 acres) which are all closely situated.

The property comprises a mix of sagebrush grasslands, mixed grass prairie, ponderosa pine forest dominated ridges and coulees, badlands habitats, and agricultural fields. The property provides winter and year-round habitat and hunting opportunity for bighorn sheep, mule deer, elk, antelope, sage-grouse and other upland game birds. The property would provide habitat improvement opportunities through the restoration of agricultural land to permanent vegetative cover. An easement on this property would improve public access to over 20,000 acres of public land.

A CE on the property would help enhance and conserve a large tract of native habitats for the benefit of wildlife, while maintaining the property's traditional ranching and agricultural values. An easement would also protect and expand recreational opportunities in this area.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

FWP Region 6 would implement a public involvement process under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) and subsequently make a recommendation to the Commission, also pending the outcomes of negotiations with the seller and appraisals. Meetings with the local County Commission showed preliminary support for the project.

Alternatives and Analysis:

No action is the only viable alternative to this proposal. FWP would lose the opportunity to partner with the landowner to restore and permanently conserve wildlife habitats and ensure future public recreation access.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

FWP recommends endorsement by the Fish and Wildlife Commission of this proposal, allowing further development of this easement opportunity.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission endorse the Lone Tree conservation easement proposal, allowing FWP to conduct further negotiations with the landowner and complete associated analysis and public review.