

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 7, 2017

Agenda Item: Fishing Access Site Acquisition on the Yellowstone River near Columbus (R5)

Division: Fisheries

Action Needed: Endorsement

Background:

This is a high priority access point on the Yellowstone River west of Columbus providing strategic access where there is currently 13.2 miles between two existing FAS's. This river reach has a good trout fishery and receives a large amount of public use from both anglers and recreational floaters. A creel study conducted in 2007 estimated over 36,700 angler hours of use in this reach of the river with a majority of this use coming from anglers launching or taking out at this pioneered access. Public use of this river reach has increased significantly in the past 10 years.

This site has long been a concern because the existing pioneered access is located at least partially within the BNSF right-of-way with no formal public access agreement with the railroad. For liability reasons it is also highly unlikely BNSF would be willing to formalize public access at the current location because of its proximity to an active railroad line. Consequently, future public access at this site is at a considerable risk of being lost.

The benefit of acquiring this 13.45-acre property is it offers the advantage of moving the pioneered boat launch out of the railroad right-of-way to a site located on this property immediately downstream of the county road bridge. Because the railroad tracks bisect the length of the property they essentially cut off any potential overland road access to the larger portion of the property on the other side of the tracks. However, if the property were acquired by FWP that parcel would be legally accessible to wade anglers, motorboats launching from the proposed boat ramp location as well as floaters accessing the property from an upstream location. The remaining acreage accessible from the county road is sufficient for development of an access road, parking area and boat ramp. The asking price is \$59,900.

Public Involvement Process & Results:

Currently there has been no public involvement. If endorsed by the Commission, FWP will begin its due diligence process including development of an EA, which includes public notification and a 30-day comment response period.

Alternatives and Analysis:

Potential alternatives will be discussed and analyzed in the EA.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

FWP recommends the Commission to endorse the department in proceeding with its due diligence process to evaluate the possibility of acquiring this 13.45-acre parcel for development of an FAS. This is an important public access location to the Yellowstone River that is currently occurring on private land without formal permission and subsequently is at considerable risk of being lost.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve FWP's request to proceed with its due diligence process in evaluating the potential acquisition of this 13.45-acre parcel for development of an Fishing Access Site.