

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: June 14, 2018

Agenda Item: Calf Creek WMA Addition (R2)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) seeks endorsement from the Fish and Wildlife Commission to conduct negotiations and analysis for acquiring approximately 600 acres adjoining the Calf Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA), in Ravalli County. Acquiring this property would block up the WMA and would also complement adjacent conservation easement land (held by the Bitter Root Land Trust). The proposed addition is an important opportunity to protect big game winter range that is contiguous with the WMA. The property has the potential for being developed, which would directly impact wintering big game habitat on this property as well as impacting adjacent habitat functions on the WMA. The property consists of open, low-elevation, south-facing shrub and grassland slopes as well as forested sections important for big game security cover and winter range, including 50-100 elk. As part of the WMA, this property would provide walk-in access for hunting and recreation in an area of the Bitterroot that offers little access to the National Forest through private land. This property may also provide a second access point to the WMA (to be determined).

Public Involvement Process & Results:

Pending the Commission's endorsement to proceed, FWP would work with the landowner and begin an environmental assessment with public participation. The results of the public involvement process would inform FWP's final proposal and recommendation for Commission action at a future Commission meeting.

Alternatives and Analysis:

No action is the only viable alternative, which would leave the current ownership pattern in place.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale:

FWP recommends the Commission endorse FWP's further exploration and development of a fee-title purchase project that would add about 600 acres to the Calf Creek WMA and block up the WMA with neighboring conserved lands. Because of its winter range function contiguous with the WMA, this would be a natural addition.

Proposed Motion:

I move the Commission endorse FWP's proposal to negotiate this proposed 600-acre addition to the Calf Creek WMA and complete associated due diligence and analysis.