

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: October 17, 2018

Agenda Item: Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area Addition

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP proposes to acquire a private, 161-acre inholding within an expanse of public land including the Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area and adjacent Custer-Gallatin National Forest. The department further proposes as part of this final action to assign the conservation easement on this inholding, currently held by FWP, to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Acquiring this inholding, that also includes a year-round road-access easement across the WMA, is critical to maintaining the functional integrity of the WMA and surrounding public lands near the divide between Paradise Valley and Gardiner Basin. The property lies within important bull elk winter range and is adjacent to an important migratory corridor for elk. The area is important for connectivity between winter and summer ranges for the migratory northern Yellowstone elk herd, as well as population connectivity and dispersal corridors for many species of wildlife including grizzly bears. This parcel is a small but important addition to the WMA and to an expanse of native habitat that provides wildlife and recreational connectivity between Yellowstone Park and areas to the north in Montana. The parcel was purchased by The Conservation Fund, subject to an option agreement, to help FWP bridge this acquisition. The value of the inholding was appraised at \$1.37 million. TCF intends to sell the parcel to FWP as a bargain sale for \$550,775.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP released a draft environmental assessment seeking public review of the proposed acquisition on May 5, 2018; it was available for public comment for 30 days. A legal notice of the proposal and availability of the draft EA was published in two newspapers, and notification of the EA's availability was emailed to a Livingston area distribution list of over 100 interested persons held by the Livingston biologist. FWP received a total of 14 comments, including 10 from private individuals and four from organizations. One individual submitted a comment in opposition to the proposed acquisition; all others were in support.

Alternatives and Analysis

The only alternative would be to forego the acquisition, which would allow the sale of this parcel at full market value. Continued private ownership and associated travel easement through the WMA would result in continued disturbance and conflicts on the WMA and adjacent public lands.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the commission approve the purchase of this addition to the Dome Mountain WMA and the transfer of the conservation easement on this inholding to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. The parcel would be a strategic addition to the WMA, helping retain the area's high resource and recreational values. FWP recommends transferring the conservation easement to avoid administering a conservation easement on land the department would own in fee title.

Proposed Motion

I move the commission approve the purchase of this addition to the Dome Mountain WMA and the transfer of the conservation easement on this inholding to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation.