

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: February 13, 2019

Agenda Item: Partial assignment of conservation easement (access) on Graveley Ranch (R2)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

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Background: Five Valleys Land Trust (FVLT), the Department of Justice Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP), and the Graveley family are working to place a conservation easement (CE) on 5,167 acres of Graveley Ranch land in the foothills of the Garnet Mountains near Garrison in Powell County (see separate Figure). The Graveleys have agreed to grant a conservation easement to FVLT that includes perpetual public hunting access, in combination with an adjacent 3,110-acre property (NCP Bayou II) that would be purchased by the Graveley Ranch with funds from the sale of the Graveley Ranch CE. The combined properties would therefore result in a conservation footprint of 8,277 acres in the area. FVLT proposes to assign the management of public hunting access on the CEs to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) in perpetuity. On their current property, the Graveleys have historically allowed more than 400 hunter days annually. FWP would work with the landowners to identify minimum hunter days, consistent with historic use, for perpetual public hunting access for this property. Funding for the Graveley Ranch CE would come from NRDP and FVLT. No FWP funds would be involved; therefore, the proposed action is for FWP to pursue accepting management of the right of public hunting access on the Graveley Ranch CE in perpetuity.

Public Involvement Process & Results: This is a new proposal before the commission, so no public comment or involvement has been solicited by FWP to date. Requisite public involvement through a draft environmental assessment (EA) and public hearing would be sought, pending approval to proceed. NRDP recently conducted a 30-day public comment period for its proposed funding of a portion of these CE proposals, and the 11 comments it received were all in general support of its funding proposal.

Alternatives and Analysis:

Proposed Action: FWP proposes to work with FVLT, NRDP, and the Graveley family to secure a conservation outcome for the Graveley Ranch property, including the management of perpetual public hunting access assigned to FWP.

No-Action Alternative: FWP would forgo the opportunity to pursue this public hunting access opportunity. This outcome may result in a failed CE project (i.e., the CE would not be purchased and finalized due to lack of a public hunting access component in the CE as desired by NRDP, an essential funding institution). In that event, the opportunity to secure perpetual public hunting access could be lost.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends that it be allowed to pursue and evaluate this opportunity to receive assignment of the public hunting access to this property.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission endorse FWP's proposal to pursue and evaluate this opportunity to accept delegation from FVLT of the public hunting access rights of FVLT's proposed Graveley Ranch conservation easement.