



Environmental Assessment Decision Notice
Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area Agricultural Lease
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
March 11, 2020

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

The 1,169-acre, Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area (WMA) was obtained by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) in 1969 using hunting license and Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration funds with subsequent additions occurring in 1970 and 1973. The management goal of this property is to protect existing riparian habitat and maintain a mosaic of native and cropland habitat for the benefit of white-tailed deer and pheasant, thereby providing recreational opportunity for sportsmen.

The 345 acres of the WMA associated with the proposed agricultural lease were cultivated prior to acquisition. The proposed management action would be limited to these irrigated fields allowing the lessee to cultivate and harvest a crop in a portion (approximately 75%) of the cropland. In return, the lessee would be required to cultivate and leave standing annual habitat plots in the remaining portion (approximately 25%) of the cropland for the benefit of wildlife.

ALTERNATIVE TO PROPOSED ACTION

Alternative A: No Action: Agricultural lease would not be renewed; agricultural lands would be left idle and noxious weeds would likely replace crops and habitat plots. This alternative would require FWP to commit resources from other programs and efforts to manage noxious weeds on 345 acres of irrigated ground previously managed by a lessee. If winter habitat is not present on the WMA, wildlife may utilize neighboring private lands more, potentially resulting in more game damage issues.

Alternative B: Proposed Action: Agricultural lease would be renewed; wildlife would benefit from wintering habitat and forage created in the cultivated areas especially in the unharvested areas left for wildlife. FWP would not use limited resources controlling noxious weeds in the of existing cultivated fields.

PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and make a decision based on this information. FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for public review of this proposal (Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area Agricultural Lease) on January 31, 2020 and accepted public comment until February 28, 2020.

Legal notice of the proposal and availability of the draft EA was published in the *Billings Gazette*, *Helena Independent Record* and *Forsyth Independent Press*. Copies of the environmental assessment were provided to neighboring landowners and interested individuals, groups, and agencies to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project. The EA was available for public review on FWP's web site (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>, "Recent Public Notices" and "Submit Public Comments"). An FWP statewide news release was issued and posted on FWP's website (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>, "News Releases").

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT

FWP did not receive any public comments.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENT

FWP did not receive any public comments.

DECISION NOTICE

In accordance with the Environmental Assessment process, a decision must be rendered by FWP which addresses the concerns and issues identified for this proposed action. I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

After review of this proposal, it is my decision to accept the draft Environmental Assessment as supplemented by this Decision Notice and changes herein as final, and to recommend proceeding with the proposed Isaac Homestead WMA agricultural lease.

The Final Environmental Assessment may be viewed on FWP's Internet website: <http://www.fwp.mt.gov> or be obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 7 Headquarters, P.O. Box 1630, Miles City, MT 59301, (406) 234-0900.

Brad Schmitz



FWP Regional Supervisor, Region 7