MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

Decision Notice

Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area Grazing Lease Extension
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Region 6
1 Airport Road
Glasgow, MT 59804
406-228-3700

March 13, 2020

Proposed Action *(Alternative B)*

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposed to extend the grazing lease for the Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area (WMA) for six years until December 31, 2026. The proposed action would continue the existing grazing system which includes WMA and adjacent private and leased property. The grazing system permits an average grazing pressure on the WMA of 264 AUMs. There would be a maximum of 100 Animal Units (100 cow/calf pairs) permitted on the WMA. Pastures on the WMA would still be grazed in a three-pasture rest-rotation grazing system, but these pastures would receive additional periods of rest.

Alternatives to the Proposed Action

Alternative A

Under the no action alternative, the grazing lease for Fresno Reservoir WMA would not be extended. There would be no livestock grazing on the Fresno Reservoir WMA in 2021. The absence of grazing would increase residual grass cover and vegetation heights, which would provide additional nesting cover for upland nesting birds but would reduce the heterogeneity in vegetation heights preferred by other wildlife species. The long-term absence of grazing could result in an increase in fire fuels and wildfire risk. FWP would continue to manage the WMA to benefit wildlife and provide recreational opportunity.

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Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Process

FWP prepared a draft environmental assessment (EA) pursuant to MEPA and is required to assess the potential impacts of the alternatives to the human and physical environment. FWP mailed notices of the EA to surrounding landowners, Hill County commissioners, Bureau of Reclamation, and local officials. Electronic notifications of the EA's availability were also made to other individuals, agencies, and interested parties. The EA was open for a 30-day public comment period that ran from February 4th to March 4th. The EA was also available for public review on the FWP website and at the Havre Area Resource office and the FWP Regional office in Glasgow.

A public hearing to provide information on the proposal, answer questions, and take public comments was held on February 13th in Havre. The meeting was attended by 1 person. There were public notices posted in the both the Great Falls Tribune and Havre Daily News informing the public of the draft environmental assessment and opportunity for comment.

Summary of Public Comment

FWP received no individual comments during the comment period. The only attendee at the public meeting indicated their support of the extension of the grazing lease.

Decision

Based on the Environmental Assessment it has been determined that the proposed action will not have significant effects on the human and physical environment associated with this action. Therefore an environmental assessment (EA) is the appropriate level of analysis for this project.

After review of this proposal and the public comments submitted, it is my decision to accept the Decision Notice and Draft Environmental Assessment as final and proceed with Alternative B, the proposed action, allowing grazing on the Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area until December 31, 2026.

BOR leases outside the WMA that are identified in the grazing system are 5-year term leases that are awarded through a limited bid process. If the leases on these parcels were awarded to another bidder, the grazing system for the WMA would need to be modified.

The Record of Decision will be available for public viewing on the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks website at: http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices. Copies may also be obtained from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Havre Area Office, 2165 Hwy 2 East, Havre, MT 59501, (406) 265-6177.

Mark Sullivan 3-3-2020

Mark Sullivan
FWP Region 6 Supervisor