



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: August 13, 2020

Agenda Item: Kootenai Forestlands Phase 2 Conservation Easement, Region 1

Action Needed: Endorsement **Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

Background: FWP is working with The Trust for Public Land (TPL) and the Stimson Lumber Company on a proposed project to place 27,289 acres of highly productive timberland in northwest Montana, just east and south of Libby, under conservation easement (CE). The proposed CE, to be held by FWP, would allow Stimson to retain ownership of these timberlands, preclude development, protect important wildlife habitat and key landscape connectivity, and provide public access and associated recreational opportunities. The US Forest Service Forest Legacy Program and grant funding raised by TPL would be likely funding sources if this proposal were to proceed to completion.

This project would protect key winter range and a migratory corridor for elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, and moose. In addition, it would protect critical habitat for bull trout, grizzly bear, and Canada lynx, ESA-listed threatened species found on the property. The project would also reduce human-wildlife conflicts that come with residential development of properties within wildlife habitat, especially those with grizzly bears, black bears, and mountain lions. The property currently provides over 26,500 days of public hunting and angling, which would be secured in perpetuity under this proposal. Completion of this project would build on the success of the nearby Forest Legacy Program-funded 142,000-acre Thompson-Fisher CE, the 28,000-acre Kootenai Valleys CE, and the recently completed 22,295-acre Kootenai Forestlands Conservation Project Phase I, which was the first phase of this project. Forest Legacy projects in Montana and Idaho have cumulatively helped to conserve 317,000 acres of working forestlands.

Public Involvement Process & Results: TPL and Stimson met with the Lincoln County Commissioners to apprise them of this potential project and received their unanimous support. The proposal also has support from the Montana congressional delegation, federal agencies, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and many conservation groups. No formal public involvement has yet occurred. If the commission endorses moving forward with this project, FWP would conduct appropriate due diligence, analysis, and public review processes.

Alternatives and Analysis: Proposal alternatives and analysis would be developed by FWP (upon endorsement by the commission) and released in a draft EA for public review/comment opportunity.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the commission endorse this proposed project to allow the department to continue working with TPL and Stimson on this proposal to conserve valuable fish and wildlife habitat and public recreational opportunities.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission endorse the proposal to further negotiate the Kootenai Forestlands Phase 2 Conservation Easement and complete associated analysis.