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Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks

# Montana Fish & Wildlife Commission

## MINUTES

### Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting

FWP Region 1 Headquarters – 490 North Meridian Road; Kalispell, MT

June 7, 2017

Commission Members Present: Dan Vermillion, Chairman, Logan Brower, Tim Aldrich  
Richard Stuker Vice-Chairman via telephone  
Shane Colton via video

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Staff Present: Martha Williams, Director and FWP Staff.

Guests: June 7, 2017 - See Commission file folder for sign-in sheet.

#### Topics of Discussion:

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of Commission Expenses
3. Commission Reports
4. Director's Report
5. Furbearer and Trapping Regulations, Seasons and Quotas – Proposed  
2017 Quotas  
Mandatory Trapper Education and Trap Equipment
6. 2017/2018 Wolf Hunting Seasons, Quotas and HD Boundaries, and SB 200 Quotas – Final
7. 2017 Mountain Lion Quotas – Final
8. 2017 Fall Upland Game Bird and Fall Turkey Quotas and Limits – Final
9. 2017 Deer, Elk and Antelope Quotas Outside Biennial Quota Ranges – Final
10. 2017 Moose, Sheep and Goat Quotas Outside Biennial Quota Ranges – Final
11. 2017 Bison Quotas – Final
12. Nongame Check-Off Work Plan – Proposed
13. 2017 HB 454 Hunting Access Agreements – Final
14. Big Horn Sheep and Mountain Goat Augmentations – Proposed
15. HD 311 Late Shoulder Season North of Highway 84 (Bozeman to Norris Road) – Proposed
16. Fleecer Wildlife Management Area Addition (R3) – Final
17. Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area Addition (Willard) (R2) – Final
18. Beartooth Wildlife Management Area Grazing Lease (R4) – Final
19. Beckman Wildlife Management Area Grazing Lease (R4) – Final
20. Beckman Wildlife Management Area Farming Lease (R4) – Final
21. DeCock Ranch Conservation Easement (R7) – Endorsement
22. Ponessa Ranch Conservation Easement (R7) – Endorsement
23. Horse Creek Complex Conservation Easement (R7) – Endorsement
24. Teton River Instream Flow Water Right Lease - Endorsement
25. Sunburst Lake Fishing Regulation Waiver (R1) – Final
26. Gold Creek Fishing Access Site Acquisition (R2) – Final
27. Blacktail Meadows Fishing Access Site Proposed Easement (R3) – Endorsement
28. Redwater River Fishing Access Site Acquisition (R6) – Endorsement
29. Public Comment – For Issues Not On This Agenda – Adjournment

#### 1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Vermillion called the meeting to order at 8:34 a.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### 2. Approval of Commission Expenses

*Action: Commissioner Colton moved and Vice-Chairman Stuker seconded the motion to approve the April and May 2017 Commission expenses. Motion passed.*

### 3. Commission Reports

Commissioner Colton recognized Ron Moody as a friend and Commissioner; Ron was a courageous Commissioner; he engaged with and listened to the public; will be greatly missed; resolution should be drafted.

Vice-Chairman Stuker stated he agrees with a resolution be drafted for Ron. Has received a lot of comments regarding the dog training rule; he has stated the rule is a Department rule, not a Commission rule and to contact the Department for any questions. Received calls on hunting district (HD) 447; individuals are asking, if possible, to have a shoulder season this fall; spoke with Region 4 Supervisor, Gary Bertellotti and he (and staff) are looking into it; if it is a possibility, he will ask the Commissioners to consider it.

Commissioner Aldrich reported he had conversations with staff on wolf quotas; good conversations. Attended the Region 1 Citizen Advisory Council in Kalispell; good meeting and conversations.

Commissioner Brower stated he has received calls regarding the dog training rule. Will be attending the Region 6 and 7 staff meeting in July.

Chairman Vermillion echoed Commissioner Colton's and Stuker's comments regarding Ron Moody; very dedicated and respectful; left a great legacy and will be missed; resolution will be drafted. Received several calls on the dog training rule. Region has received a lot of snow this year but it is drying out. Department is in the final process of gathering fish populations for the Yellowstone River in areas where the proliferative kidney disease (PKD) outbreak was last year. Thanked Region 1 staff for hosting the Commission tour/meeting; great staff, work very well together. The proposed dog training rule is a Department rule, not a Commission rule; the rule is out for public comment until June 9; a public hearing will be held at a date to be determined.

### 4. Director's Report

Director Williams echoed the Commission's comments on Ron Moody; he was involved until the very end. Thanked Region 1 staff for putting the Department's best foot forward and hosting the Commission tour/meeting. Appreciates the Commission for holding meetings around the state. Trying to get to each Region and their Citizen Advisory Council (CAC) meetings; while traveling around the state, she is impressed by the commitment, dedication and level of professionalism with staff. Working on the legislation requirement that directs the Department pays for Enforcement's personal services with 30% of Pitman-Robertson money; big shift for the Department.

Eileen Ryce, Fisheries Administrator, gave a lengthy update aquatic invasive species (AIS) and PKD.

Chairman Vermillion stated he has received numerous phone calls on the new AIS fee; has relayed to the individuals this was not a Commission nor Department rule and that the legislature felt it was appropriate to put 100% of the fees on fishermen/women; sportsmen/women are being asked to carry the burden for what is a societal problem; directed the public to notify their local legislators.

Director Williams stated the Department is comprehensively looking at funding going forward for the Departments AIS program, so it doesn't just fall on anglers; trying to be proactive.

### 5. Furbearer and Trapping Regulations, Seasons and 2017 Quotas and Mandatory Trapper Education and Trap Equipment – Proposed

John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief, explained FWP proposes to:

- Establish a Trapper Education Program and Mandatory Trapper Education requirement for most people trapping furbearers, predators (coyote, weasel and skunk), wolves, fox, badger and racoon to start taking effect in 2018.
- By the 2019 trapping season require modifications to ground-set foothold traps set for the above species that include a center swivel, an additional chain swivel, and jaws with minimum offset and thickness. Persons trapping for purposes of livestock or property protection would be exempt from these requirements.
- Increase the Region 1 and 2 otter per-person take and possession limit from 2 to 3.

Mandatory Trapper Education will ensure that new trappers have the basic knowledge and skills to trap safely, humanely, and effectively. It will also provide peer-to-peer interaction that sets ethical standards even where regulations may not exist or provide clear guidance or may be difficult to enforce.

- Beginning in 2018, establish a Trapper Education Program and Mandatory Trapper Education requirement for people trapping furbearers (beaver, otter, muskrat, mink, marten, fisher, wolverine, bobcat, swift fox and lynx), predators (coyote, weasel and skunk), wolves, fox, badger and racoon.
- Persons would be required to attend and complete a state-sanctioned trapper education course include those: born after January 1, 1985, or purchasing a Montana trapping license for the first time, or who have not purchased a trapping license during the previous five license years, or convicted of violating FWP trapping regulations. State-sanctioned trapper education courses from other states taken before 2019 meet the education requirement.

- To trap wolves in Montana a person must attend and complete either the Idaho or Montana wolf trapping certification class; the proposed Montana's trapper education course would cover wolf trapping and meet this requirement. In the future, there would not be a separate wolf trapping course.
- Mandatory trapper education will be required of all first-time trappers to purchase a 2018-19 license and all others to purchase a 2019-20 license.
- By the 2019 trapping season require modifications to ground-set foothold traps set that include a center swivel, an additional chain swivel, and jaws with minimum offset and thickness.

Persons trapping for purposes of livestock or property protection would be exempt from these requirements. The proposed changes represent a significant impact to trappers, on the order of \$350,000 - \$2.3 million along with approximately 57,000 hours of time modifying or replacing traps. Trapping is integral to managing many Montana wildlife populations and is also a valued economic and recreational activity that is part of an outdoor heritage that defines Montana's culture. All other elements of the furbearers and trapping regulations are to remain unchanged from 2016. This proposal aligns with recommendations of the 1998-99 Trapping Advisory Committee, a group of 10 citizens of diverse background appointed by FWP who spent 6 months and held public meetings throughout Montana to develop recommendations related to trapping. The Montana Trappers Association (MTA) and the Montana Fur Harvesters (MFH) have cooperated with FWP to develop this proposal. Public comment will be taken through July 16.

**Action:** *Commissioner Aldrich moved and Commissioner Brower seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt for public comment the proposed mandatory trapper education, trap modifications and Region 1 and 2 otter take and possession limit as proposed by FWP.*

Vice-Chairman and Vore discussed the grandfathered clause.

Vice-Chairman Stuker asked to have the grandfathered clause clarified more clearly.

Commissioner Colton stated he is in support of the motion with the exception of the trap modification portion.

Vice-Chairman Stuker stated he agrees with Commissioner Colton; cannot vote for the modifications at this time; need additional work and more communications between the Department and Montana Trappers Association.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Leo Christensen, Bozeman, approve the mandatory education; disagrees with trap modification.

Zach Strong, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), supports trappers education program and required improvements to foothold traps; these measures will not significantly reduce severe injury to non-targeted animals; Montana should require that traps be regularly checked; it is concerning that the only members of the public the Department consulted with prior to the meeting were trappers, trappers are not the only ones that are interested in furbearers and how they are managed; Commissioner nor FWP responded to his letter explaining and suggesting the need for a trap-check requirements; asked the Commission to encourage the Department in the future to collaborate with the rest of the public, not just trappers.

Coleen O'Rourke, Bozeman, supports trapper education; has concerns about trap modifications; proposal highly regulates traps, would be costly; does not support trap checks, trapper education could address this topic; education is the key, not regulation.

Nick Gevok, Montana Wildlife Federation (MWF), well written document; strongly supports; element to maintaining trapping in the future; encourages to consider and develop alternative means of defining how often non-lethal leg hold traps are to be checked.

Allan Minear and Neal Green (reiterated by Commissioner Colton), in support of mandatory education and increased otter quotas; resistant to the mandatory trap modifications.

Don Bothwell, Kalispell, trapper education educator; appreciates considering this proposal; trappers in Montana have advocated for this for a long time; opposes mandatory trap modifications; concerned with the 24-hour trap check.

Bert Wustner, Lolo, supports proposal with the exception of the trap modifications.

Bob Sheppard, Ovando, agrees with the proposal; education is important.

Marc Cooke, Wolves of the Rockies, (WoR), 24-hour trap checks are needed and would help the Department save money; many people do not want trapping in Montana and are looking at the Commission to find common ground; demographics have changed; would have some heartburn with who the instructors would be; education is good.

John Wilson, Missoula, supports proposal with the exception to trap modifications; trapping is a tool that is needed.

Ken Cordoza, MFH, supports education; supports trap modifications.

Dan Helterline, Plains, agrees with proposal with exception of trap modification, better addressed with education.

Rick Hawk, Kalispell, supports trapper education; opposed to mandatory trap-check; trap modification will come in time.

Jerry Shively, Thompson Falls, opposed to mandatory trap check and trap modifications; trapper education should be done by trappers.

Tom Fleber, Polson, the three issues were brought about by anti-trapping groups; would like the Commission to support the trappers a little more; FWP staff is exemplary to work with; in support of education.

Chairman Vermillion stated this is the beginning of the public process; conversations are important with the Department, trapping community and the non-trapping community; long term survival of trapping depends on communication; would like the modification portion go out for public comment, does not mean the modification will go through in the end.

Vice-Chairman Stuker stated he believes communication is important also; need to try and find common ground; all groups need to be represented; all parties need to have an open mind.

Commissioner Aldrich stated his motion is not a signal of what it will be in the end, it is to look at the broader picture.

Commissioner Colton stated the Commission has shown, over the years, support for these particular sportsmen/women and have a lot of trust in them; supports Chairman Vermillion's comments.

*Action on Motion: Motion passed. 3-2*

*Aye – Vermillion, Aldrich, Brower*

*Nay – Colton, Stuker*

#### **6. 2017/2018 Wolf Hunting Seasons, Quotas and HD Boundaries, and SB 200 Quotas – Final**

John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief, stated there are two differences from the original April proposal:

- based on internal input, FWP proposes that WMU 110, a unit with a harvest quota, will close on a 12-hour instead of 24-hour notice to make it consistent with WMUs 313 and 316, the other quota areas in the state, and
- allow wolf trapping on Spotted Dog Wildlife Management Area (WMA) to a limited number of specially-permitted trappers like that already done on three other R2 WMAs. Aside from these and regular calendar rotation, for 2017-18 FWP is proposing no change to the 2016-17 season.

Comment period closed May 31, 2017; 346 comments were received; 292 comments were from non-residents and generally opposed to wolf hunting and trapping, and wanting a buffer zone around YNP, which is not allowed by statute; 41 resident comments represented the spectrum from no tolerance of wolves through proposal support to wanting no hunting or trapping and requesting Senate Bill 200 quota be reduced.

*Action: Vice-Chairman Stuker moved and Commissioner Brower seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the proposed 2017-2018 wolf season and SB 200 quotas as presented by FWP.*

Chairman Vermillion noted the only comment the Commission will be taking public comment on is the two changes from the original April proposal.

Vice-Chairman Stuker asked if the Department has any data on WMU 110, 313, and 316 that talks about mortality rates (ie: poaching, hit by car etc.).

Vore stated there is record incidental kills for this area and he will send the information to the Commission.

Chairman Vermillion stated the Department has showed it has the ability to manage this type of wildlife; commends the public on supporting this process; has come along the way since the delisting.

Commissioner Aldrich stated the criteria the wolf plan was built upon is important; reflection of a lot of public activity.

Vore agreed and stated the seven Commission adopted measurable wolf objectives are:

1. Maintain a viable and connected wolf population in Montana.
2. Gain and maintain authority for State of Montana to manage wolves.

3. Maintain positive and effective working relationships with livestock producers, hunters, and other stakeholders.
- 4a. Reduce wolf impacts on livestock.
- 4b. Reduce wolf impacts on big game populations.
- 4c. Maintain sustainable hunter opportunity for wolves.
- 4d. Maintain sustainable hunter opportunity for ungulates.
5. Increase broad public acceptance of sustainable harvest and hunter opportunity as part of wolf conservation.
6. Enhance open and effective communication to better inform decisions
7. Learn and improve as we go.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Marc Cooke, WoR, appreciates WMU 110 change; troubles in Yellowstone, 12-hour trap check is the way to go; opposes Spotted Dog proposal; Department needs to get stakeholders a title and respect; wolf numbers are down; need to manage wolves.

Unknown, disagrees with Cooke's statement; Department say wolf numbers are up and he says wolf counts are down.

Jim Williams, Region 1 Supervisor, stated it is incredible what Montana has done with living, conserving, recovering and maintaining large carnivores; people care.

*Action on Motion: Motion passed.*

**7. 2017 Mountain Lion Quotas – Final**

John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief, stated the final proposal is unchanged from the tentative proposal (see minutes from the April 14, 2017 Commission meeting) with the exception of: The cover sheet for the April meeting contained a misprint that listed HD 471 along with HDs 410, 417 and 419; in the table below it is correctly shown as HD 426 (highlighted).

Proposed Adjustments – Montana 2017 Mountain Lion Quotas		
Hunting District(s)	Current Quota	Proposed Quota
312, 393	7 total with 2 female subquota	9 total with 4 female subquota
320, 333	6 total with 2 female subquota	4 total with 1 female subquota
331	7 total with 3 female subquota	5 total with 2 female subquota
410, 417, 419, 426	3 males & 8 females	5 males & 8 females
405, 447, 471	3 males & 2 females	4 males & 3 females
422, 423, 424, 425, 442	11 males & 4 females	8 males & 5 females

Area landowners, sportsmen and FWP wardens are generally supportive of these proposals and have specifically called for a lion quota increase in the Missouri Breaks. Public comment was solicited through May 31; 11 comments were received; 4 opposed hunting, 1 wanting low quotas in general, 1 opposed to reducing quotas in HDs 320 and 333, 1 wanting all quotas raised, 1 wanting more male lions in NW Montana and the winter season to end earlier, 1 wanting an increase in HDs 270, 250 and 270, 1 stated there are too many lions and 1 supporting an increase in 393.

*Action: Commissioner Brower moved and Vice-Chairman Stuker seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the proposed 2017 lion quotas/subquotas as presented by FWP.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

*Action on Motion: Motion passed.*

**8. 2017 Fall Upland Game Bird and Fall Turkey Quotas and Limits – Final**

John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief, explained upland game bird and fall turkey season dates for 2017 were approved in February 2016. Other than normal calendar date rotation, no changes to the 2016 adopted quotas and limits are proposed. Sage-grouse lek count data for this year is not all entered and analyzed yet, but a preliminary analysis of available data promises it to be another very good year. Reports from across the state are above average in most areas with several new leks being found. Southwest Montana counts are slightly below average. Sage grouse populations naturally cycle up and down, and the Department wants to make the Commission and public aware that we expect a downturn in the next few years; any decline in the population in the future will likely not be due to hunting; barring severe weather or disease, this is natural and expected and unrelated to carefully regulated hunting.

*Action: Commissioner Aldrich moved and Vice-Chairman Stuker seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the proposed 2017 upland game bird and fall turkey bag, possession and license quota limits as unchanged from 2016.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

*Action on Motion: Motion passed.*

#### 9. 2017 Deer, Elk and Antelope Quotas Outside Biennial Quota Ranges – Final

John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief, explained the Commission previously adopted quota ranges for deer and elk B licenses and antelope licenses for each HD within which FWP can make changes that do not need Commission approval; changes outside the adopted ranges do need Commission approval. FWP is proposing three such changes for deer and one for elk as shown below. Note that deer trend counts are not total population counts but are an index of population size and track population trajectory. No other changes are proposed. Proposed changes are:

**Deer:** **HD 405** – Increase the mule deer 405-00 B-license quota from 50 to 400 and the biennial range from 25-250 to 25-750. The objective is to reduce deer numbers and landowner complaints, and benefit the habitat. The general season type is for either-sex deer. The long-term average trend count is 611 and the 2017 count was 1,027.

**HD 500** – Increase the mule deer 500-00 B-license quota from 200 to 400 and the biennial range from 5-200 to 5-600. The objective is to increase antlerless harvest and stabilize the population near the long-term average as per adaptive harvest management (AHM) guidelines. The general season type is for either-sex deer. The long-term average trend count is 674 and the 2017 count was 1,897.

**HD 530** – Increase the mule deer 530-00 B-license quota from 10 to 200 and the biennial range from 5-50 to 5-400. The objective is to increase antlerless harvest and stabilize the population near the long-term average as per AHM guidelines. The general season type is limited buck permits with B-licenses. The long-term average trend count is 232 and the 2017 count was 354.

**Elk:** **HD 204** – Increase the 204-00 antlerless elk B-license quota from 100 to 150 and the biennial range from 5-100 to 5-200. The objective is to reduce elk numbers toward the population objective. The general season type is for brow-tined bulls. The objective is 600 and the 2016 count was 1,056.

Season justifications for the deer seasons, mule deer have recovered very well from the lows in 2014. As noted in the season justifications for the various proposals, there is good public support from sportsmen, sportsmen's clubs, landowners, and area game wardens. Regional staff does not anticipate much opposition. For the HD 204 elk proposal the Hellgate Hunters and Anglers (HHA) is in general support the proposal but voiced a concern about overharvesting public land elk.

Commissioner Aldrich and Vore discussed numerous elk issues within HD 204.

**Action:** *Commissioner Aldrich moved and Commissioner Brower seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the proposed changes to deer and elk quotas and biennial quota ranges as proposed by FWP.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

**Action on Motion:** *Motion passed.*

#### 10. 2017 Moose, Sheep and Goat Quotas Outside Biennial Quota Ranges – Final

John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief, explained the Commission previously adopted quota ranges for moose, bighorn sheep and mountain goat for each HD within which FWP can make changes that do not need Commission approval. However, changes outside the adopted ranges do need Commission approval. FWP is proposing two such changes: one each for moose and sheep. No other changes outside of the adopted quota ranges are proposed. Proposed changes are:

**Moose:** FWP proposes to reduce the 513-50 antlered-bull licenses in the Fishtail-Stillwater area from 3 to 1 and to change the adopted quota range from 3-10 to 1-10. Much of the moose winter range in this HD was negatively impacted by fire in 1988, and the moose population has been in a long-term decline since that time. This decline is further reflected by declining hunter success and increased hunter effort. Survey data also suggests the population is only recruiting 2 to 4 moose/year – 1 to 2 bull moose/year. In the face of these data issuing 3 bull licenses/year appears to be excessive.

**Bighorn Sheep:** FWP proposes to increase the 301-20 either-sex licenses in the Spanish Peaks from 5 to 7 and to change the adopted quota range from 2-5 to 2-10. This herd is doing well and the proposed increase in licenses follows criteria in the Montana Bighorn Sheep Conservation Strategy.

These proposals have not been presented to any sport groups or landowners. Moose license holders that have come through the Columbus Check Station in the last couple of years have consistently complained about the lack of moose sightings. The bighorn sheep proposal is expected to be widely supported.

**Action:** *Commissioner Brower moved and Commissioner Aldrich seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the changes to the 513-50 moose and 301-20 bighorn sheep licenses as proposed by FWP.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

**Action on Motion: Motion passed. 11. 2017 Bison Quotas – Final**

John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief, explained the Commission annually approves bison license quotas. FWP is proposing no changes to the 2016-17 quotas. Current quotas are:

**HD 385 - Gardiner Basin and Absaroka Beartooth Areas**

- 385-20: 40 licenses                      November 15 - February 15      Either Sex.
- 385-21: 5 licenses.                      Only valid in the Absaroka Beartooth portion of the HD.
- 385-77: Bison Hunt Roster      November 15 - February 15      Second Choice only license.

**HD 395 - West Yellowstone and Cabin Creek Monument Mountain Areas**

- 395-20: 40 licenses                      November 15 - February 15      Either Sex.
- 395-77: Bison Hunt Roster      November 15 - February 15      Second Choice only license.

During the 2016 season the 85 licensed hunters in Montana took 70 bison, including three of the five 385-21 backcountry wilderness licenses. In addition, Native American hunters from five tribes took 398 bison under aboriginal treaty rights; FWP has no authority over aboriginal treaty right hunting.

**Action: Commissioner Aldrich moved and Commissioner Brower seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the 2017 bison quotas of no change from 2016 as proposed by FWP.**

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

**Action on Motion: Motion passed.**

**12. Nongame Check-Off Work Plan – Proposed**

John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief, explained under the provisions “the FWP Commission shall review and annually approve the nongame wildlife program’s projects recommended by the Department for funding from the nongame wildlife account. The Commission shall provide for public comment during the review and approval process.” While final 2016 tax year donations are unknown at this time, the average received by FWP from the 2004-2015 tax years was \$30,000/year. FWP is proposing the following work in FY18 with this anticipated funding in addition to some balance in the fund from previous years:

- \$30,000 Inventory, monitoring and conservation work on Montana Species of Concern and species in need of inventory as determined through a formal ranking process.
- \$15,000 Wildlife viewing and outreach projects that encourage more Montanans to appreciate Montana wildlife.
- \$ 5,000 Competitive student stipend for nongame research.

The 2017 funds were distributed accordingly: \$10,000 to student stipends for bat research, and \$30,00 for a variety of wildlife viewing projects.

**Action: Commissioner Brower moved and Commissioner Aldrich seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the proposed Nongame Tax Check-Off work for Fiscal Year 2018.**

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

**Action on Motion: Motion passed.**

**13. 2017 HB 454 Hunting Access Agreements – Final**

John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief, explained under the statute provisions, FWP received the authority to issue either-sex or antlerless elk permits to landowners for management purposes. The landowner must offer free public elk hunting, meet the various conditions of the statute, and enter a contractual public elk hunting access agreement with FWP. The contract defines the areas open to public elk hunting, the number of elk hunting days that will be allowed on the property, and other factors that FWP and the landowner consider necessary for the proper management of elk on the landowner's property. There are two proposed agreements:

- John Swanz Ranch: Swanz agreement specifies two 411-21 either-sex permits for Mr. Swanz and/or a family member(s); FWP would issue eight additional 411-21 either-sex permits to the public. The Swanz agreement was first used in 2002 and has been reapplied annually since based upon continued positive post-hunt evaluations.

- Robert Lee Ranch: Robert Lee Ranch agreement specifies one 411-22 either-sex permit for Robert Lee or a family member(s); FWP would issue four additional 411-21 permits to the public. The Lee agreement was first used in 2015 and has been reapplied annually since based upon continued positive post-hunt evaluations.

*Action: Commissioner Brower moved and Commissioner Aldrich seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the proposed John Swanz Ranch and Robert Lee Ranch hunting access agreements as presented by FWP.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

*Action on Motion: Motion passed.*

#### **14. Bighorn Sheep and Mountain Goat Augmentations – Proposed**

John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief, explained augmentation to bolster struggling herds is an effective management tool that requires Commission approval to capture animals at one site and move them to another. Any final Commission endorsement for such actions would come after formal public comment. FWP is proposing two augmentations: one for mountain goats and one for bighorn sheep. The proposed augmentations are:

**Mountain goat:** Move 20 animals to Cube Iron Mountain north of Thompson Falls sometime during the winters of 2017-18 to 2019-20. This herd is currently about 20-30 animals and the target population is 75-100. The area has been closed to hunting since 1978, and recruitment has been low most likely because of natural mortality and mountain lion predation. Augmentation should boost recruitment to the point of population viability. Donor animals would most likely come from the Crazy Mountains.

**Bighorn sheep:** Move 40 animals, mostly ewes with some young rams, to the HD 122 St. Regis cutoff herd sometime during the winters of 2017-18 to 2019-20. This herd has recently declined from 100-130 to 20-25. Cause is unknown, but disease is highly suspected. 25-30% of the remaining sheep have been tested and no MoVi found. Donor herds would likely be the Middle Missouri Breaks (HD 622) and/or Petty Creek (HD 203). This action is consistent with the Montana Bighorn Sheep Conservation Strategy.

*Action: Commissioner Aldrich moved and Vice-Chairman Stuker seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt for public comment the proposed mountain goat and bighorn sheep augmentations as presented by FWP.*

Vore gave a background explanation on the Tendoy bighorn sheep herd.

Commissioner Aldrich and Vore discussed HD 203 (Petty Creek) bighorn sheep herd.

Chairman Vermillion and Vore discussed the Madison herd augmentation.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Nick Gevok, MWF, support both augmentations; need a mountain goat plan in the near future.

*Action on Motion: Motion passed.*

#### **15. HD 311 Late Shoulder Season North of Highway 84 (Bozeman to Norris Road) – Proposed**

John Vore, Game Management Bureau Chief, explained elk season structure changes are normally proposed in December with final action in February during odd-numbered years; occasionally FWP comes before the Commission when exceptional circumstances warrant a proposal outside this cycle. FWP proposes to institute a shoulder season beginning this fall running from the end of general firearms season to February 15, 2018, in the north half of HD 311, north of Highway 84. The objective is to reduce game damage and reduce brucellosis risk by changing elk distribution through prescribed hunting pressure. This proposal responds to a marked and sudden change in the distribution of over 1,800 elk that has been difficult to manage using traditional options like game damage and management hunts, hazing and herders among a patchwork of numerous landowners. Although elk are not over objective in HD 311, the shoulder season guidelines allow for a shoulder season under these circumstances. This area is within the brucellosis Designated Surveillance Area (DSA), and the elk herd of most concern here, the one at the north end of the Spanish Peaks, has a seroprevalance of 22.5%. Ranchers are very concerned about these elk mixing with their cattle. Extensive public outreach has occurred; it has been vetted through e-mail with over 100 individuals including landowners, landowner/watershed groups, outfitters, individual local sportsmen, representatives from two sportsmen's groups, FWP game wardens, the local Commissioner, and representatives from other agencies. Concerns include a shoulder season on private lands could lead to fewer elk on the National Forest the next fall; positive comments are that a shoulder season may work better than the game damage hunts, will increase hunter opportunity, and landowners appreciate using hunters to manage elk herds causing damage. Landowners are nearly unanimously in favor of this change because it will help them alleviate game damage and brucellosis concerns to at least some degree.

**Action:** *Commissioner Brower moved and Commissioner Aldrich seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt for public comment FWP's proposal for a late shoulder season in the north half of hunting district 311 beginning in 2017.*

Commissioner Aldrich stated he is encouraged by the effort, the tool is there; an opportunity to change behavior as well as remove elk.

Chairman Vermillion stated it is good to see the Department (Julie Cunningham and Howard Burt) getting this on the agenda and moving forward.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Nick Gevok, MWF, what level of harvest is occurring on private land and why aren't the damage hunts working? Have concerns about the potential negative perception of elk hunting for close to six months.

Howard Burt, Region 3 Wildlife Supervisor, has been conducting management and game damage hunts in this area for at least two years; dealing with small private land ownerships; having 30 different hunts in this area didn't work, frustrated hunters and landowners; concerned with the way this area way being hunted, distributing elk further north which is on the edge of the DSA area; issues occurred later in the season.

**Action on Motion:** *Motion passed.*

#### **16. Fleecer Wildlife Management Area Addition (R3) – Final**

Ken McDonald, Wildlife Administrator, explained FWP proposes to purchase in fee title approximately a 194-acre parcel of private land adjacent to the Fleecer Wildlife Management Area (WMA) for the appraised value of \$620,000. The property is owned by the Margaret M. Noyce Revocable Trust. Funding for the acquisition would be a combination of Pittman-Robertson, Habitat Montana, and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF). The property shares 2 miles of boundary with Fleecer WMA and is part of the Fleecer winter range that supports 700-900 elk and 150-200 antelope. The property also includes 2 miles of Divide Creek and 100 acres of associated wetland habitat that supports a trout fishery and year-round habitat for white-tailed deer. The wetland portion of the property is encumbered with a Wetland Reserve Program easement administered by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). Seventy acres of irrigated tame grass hayfields are a part of the uplands; as part of the purchase agreement, the fields would continue to be managed by the current owner as irrigated meadows through a pilot 5-year irrigation/grazing lease. FWP anticipates the lease arrangement, involving irrigation management and 120 animal use months (AUM) of prescriptive grazing, would help keep the property attractive to elk and other wildlife, while also alleviating game damage issues on adjacent private lands. Services provided by the lessee would free up FWP staff from having to maintain the irrigation system and control weeds. FWP completed an EA for the proposed action, which was released for public comment for 30 days (March 16-April 17, 2017); 10 comments were received; 8 in support, 2 opposed. If FWP were to pass on this opportunity, it is highly likely that the uplands portion of this property would eventually be developed, directly affecting big game winter range along two miles of WMA boundary.

**Action:** *Commissioner Brower moved and Chairman Vermillion seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission give final approval for acquiring this addition to the Fleecer WMA.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Chairman Vermillion asked if the Department would put together an outline of what funds are available for habitat acquisition over the next biennium and a list of current and future projects.

McDonald explained how the Department's land process works.

Chairman Vermillion thanked RMEF for their help on this addition.

Commissioner Colton stated he would like to have a work session for land issues/information.

**Action on Motion:** *Motion passed.*

#### **17. Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area Addition (Willard) (R2) – Final**

Ken McDonald, Wildlife Administrator, explained FWP proposes to purchase approximately 23 acres (hereafter, Willard Addition) from the private Willard and Shoquist Family Trust for the appraised value of \$200,000. Funding for the proposed Willard Addition would come from Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration to be matched with FWP's Habitat Montana program dollars. The Willard Addition would become part of the Blackfoot Clearwater WMA (BCWMA) and would block up the north boundary of the WMA along Woodworth Road. The location of the private property, surrounded by BCWMA, Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC), and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land gives the parcel high value for wildlife habitat and connectivity. Wildlife management goals on the surrounding land are primarily for elk and deer winter range, and for grizzly bear, Canada lynx, and other forest carnivores. FWP released a draft EA for public review on March 4, 2017; public meeting was held on March 15, 2017 in Seeley Lake, Montana where no members of the public participated; one comment in support was received. Under the "No Action" alternative, being

located along a public road, the property is a prime candidate for subdivision and/or development as residential and recreational properties. Under that scenario, the habitat functions would be compromised and impacts would likely radiate onto the WMA. Trespass through this parcel has also been an issue in the past because of the proximity of the public road; consolidation would eliminate that problem. Based on the connectivity value of the parcel to the BCWMA, the ability to block up ownership that extends to a public road, and the strategic nature of this parcel for maintaining the integrity of the north end of the Blackfoot Clearwater WMA, FWP recommends the Commission approve this purchase.

**Action:** *Commissioner Aldrich moved and Commissioner Brower seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the purchase of the Willard Addition to Blackfoot Clearwater Wildlife Management Area.*

Commissioner Aldrich stated the Department has worked hard with the adjacent landowners.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

**Action on Motion:** *Motion passed.*

Chairman Vermillion asked McDonald to present all grazing and farming leases together, and then Commission will do one motion for all.

#### **18. Beartooth Wildlife Management Area Grazing Lease (R4) – Final**

Ken McDonald, Wildlife Administrator, explained FWP is proposing to renew an expiring livestock grazing lease on portions of the Beartooth WMA (BTWMA) for one year (2018). Principles of rest-rotation grazing would continue to be used to maintain and/or enhance wildlife habitat for the resource and public benefit. The grazing lease is designed to maintain and improve productive forage and cover diversity. The Polloch Meadows pasture is predominantly brome grass, which is more attractive to elk and deer after a cattle grazing treatment. The second pasture, known as Upper Cottonwood is part of the grazing rotation, providing forage and cover diversity on native vegetation within the WMA. Both pastures combined, the lease totals 875 acres on the WMA. This lease is one of two long-standing grazing leases with Sieben Livestock, the second involving 4,575 acres on the BTWMA as well as additional lands off the WMA. This proposed one-year extension will align both leases on the same renewal schedule, allowing one EA and public review process, providing efficiency for staff and interested stakeholders. The proposed lease extension was available for public comment from April 3-24, 2017; three comments in support were received. The Department suggests approving the 1-year grazing lease with Sieben Livestock. FWP believes the action will help maintain forage and cover conditions for game and many nongame species. The system will continue to be monitored to detect any negative impacts to native vegetation.

#### **19. Beckman Wildlife Management Area Grazing Lease (R4) – Final**

Ken McDonald, Wildlife Administrator, explained FWP proposes to renew a cooperative grazing lease on 4,921 acres of the Beckman WMA and adjoining 2,695 acres of the Roe Ranch, northeast of Denton. This lease agreement would continue the use of prescriptive livestock grazing as a habitat management tool on the WMA while positively influencing privately-managed wildlife habitat. FWP released a draft EA for public review on April 14, 2017 and accepted public comment until May 12, 2017; one comment was received that did not directly address this lease renewal.

The grazing lease would be extended for an additional six years. Grazing treatments, including seasonal deferral and year-long rest, would continue to be prescribed across all affected properties to facilitate plant root development and maintenance, as well as seedling establishment of desirable plant species. There would be some continued maintenance costs related to monitoring grazing and maintaining cross fencing on the WMA if the grazing lease is renewed and would continue to be provided by the lessee. Free public hunting would also continue on the Roe Ranch, better facilitating wildlife management in the area. FWP recommends final approval of the Beckman WMA-Roe Ranch cooperative grazing lease renewal which reflects a continuation of past practices.

#### **20. Beckman Wildlife Management Area Farming Lease (R4) – Final**

Ken McDonald, Wildlife Administrator, explained FWP proposes to renew a six-year farming lease with the Roe Ranch on 103 acres of the Beckman WMA. This lease involves hay production on two alfalfa fields totaling 75 acres and the farming of 28 acres of small-grain food plots at 5 locations along the Judith River. Under terms of the lease, the lessee would be allowed to harvest one cutting of hay and be responsible for irrigating a subsequent hay crop, providing forage and cover for wildlife during late summer through winter. The food plots are primarily intended to benefit upland game birds through the winter. This lease agreement would continue the use of agricultural fields on the WMA for the mutual benefit of wildlife and an agricultural producer. FWP released a draft EA for public review of this proposal on April 14, 2017 and accepted public comment until 5:00 P.M. on May 12, 2017; no comments were received. FWP recommends the Commission give final approval for renewing the Beckman WMA-Roe Ranch cooperative farming agreement. The renewal reflects a continuation of past practices and ongoing habitat enhancement on the WMA.

**Action:** *Commissioner Brower moved and Commissioner Aldrich seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission renew the livestock grazing lease with Sieben Livestock for one year on the Polloch Meadows and Upper Cottonwood portions of the Beartooth WMA, totaling about 875 acres.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

*Action on Motion: Motion passed.*

*Action: Commissioner Colton moved and Chairman Vermillion seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve renewal of the Beckman Wildlife Management Area-Roe Ranch cooperative grazing lease for the years 2018 through 2023.*

Commissioner Colton stated this area would be a great place for the Commission to tour; great example of a modern acquisition through donor dollars and working with members of the agriculture community; pleased the Department works well with the Roe family.

Chairman Vermillion echoed Commissioner Colton's comments.

McDonald stated the Upland Game Bird Advisory Council will be touring this area during the fall meeting; will send notice to the Commissioners in case they are interested in attending.

Commissioner Brower and McDonald discussed fencing and financial responsibilities for the grazing and fencing leases.

*Action: Commissioner Colton moved and Chairman Vermillion seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve renewal of the Beckman Wildlife Management Area-Roe Ranch cooperative farming agreement for six years, beginning with the 2018 growing season.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Commissioner Colton stated in the past there was talk about expansion of this WMA and local cooperators that were interested; would like to see what resources are available to expand this area.

*Action on Motion: Motion passed.*

#### **21. DeCock Ranch Conservation Easement (R7) – Endorsement**

Ken McDonald, Wildlife Administrator, explained FWP proposes to purchase a perpetual conservation easement (CE) on 9,783 contiguous acres of deeded land on the DeCock Ranch near Hysham. In addition to 8,783 acres of native grass and sagebrush grasslands, the ranch includes approximately 1,000 acres of riparian bottomland along 7 miles of the Yellowstone River. The upland portion of the ranch includes critical habitat for antelope, mule deer and sage-grouse (within a Core Sage-grouse Area). The Yellowstone River portion of this ranch includes important riparian habitat for ring-necked pheasants, wild turkeys, white-tailed deer, Canada geese, and other waterfowl species. The DeCock Ranch is adjacent to the FWP Isaac Homestead WMA, publicly accessible DNRC land, and private land enrolled in Block Management (BM). Together, these properties make up over 250,000 contiguous acres of publicly accessible land. An additional 5,300 acres of private land enrolled in BM exists across the Yellowstone River from the DeCock Ranch. This project would add to existing conservation efforts in the area including Isaac Homestead WMA, Amelia Island WMA and approximately 50,000 acres of sagebrush grassland conserved through 30-year lease agreements with private landowners. A CE would protect healthy blocks of riparian and sagebrush habitats, benefitting wildlife and agriculture, while also increasing public hunting and fishing opportunities. FWP is collaborating with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to potentially partner on (75%) funding for this proposed CE. FWP has not sought any public comment at this time. Upon endorsement, FWP would conduct appropriate analysis, public review processes, and negotiations. To conserve the high resource values and public recreation opportunities on this land, FWP recommends endorsement by the Commission, allowing FWP to proceed with the further development of this opportunity.

*Action: Commissioner Colton moved and Chairman Vermillion seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission endorse this conservation easement project, allowing FWP to continue negotiations and to conduct analysis and associated public review for DeCock Ranch conservation easement.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

*Action on Motion: Motion passed.*

#### **22. Ponessa Ranch Conservation Easement (R7) – Endorsement**

Ken McDonald, Wildlife Administrator, explained FWP proposes to purchase a perpetual CE on 14,783 contiguous acres of deeded land north of Miles City. Approximately 90% of the ranch is native grasslands and sagebrush grasslands. The area encompasses critical winter range for antelope and mule deer and general sage-grouse range located immediately adjacent to a Core Sage-Grouse Area. Resident, huntable populations of mule deer, antelope, sharp-tailed grouse, and sage-grouse exist on the ranch. A CE would protect and enhance sagebrush grasslands, benefitting wildlife and agriculture, while also increasing public hunting opportunities. The size of the ranch, the short distance from Miles City, and the ease of accessibility via Highway 59 and county roads would make for a popular and convenient public hunting opportunity. FWP is collaborating with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to potentially partner on funding for this proposed CE. FWP has not sought any public comment at this time. Upon endorsement from the Commission, FWP would conduct appropriate analysis, public review processes, and negotiations. To conserve the high resource values and public recreation opportunities on this land, FWP recommends endorsement by the, allowing FWP to proceed with the further development of this opportunity.

**Action:** *Commissioner Colton moved and Vice-Chairman Stuker seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission endorse the Ponessa Ranch conservation easement project, allowing FWP to continue negotiations and to conduct analysis and associated public review.*

Commission commended Region 7 for bringing these projects forward; partnering with families that conduct traditional ranch operations.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Nick Gevok, MWF, supports this project.

**Action on Motion:** *Motion passed.*

### **23. Horse Creek Complex Conservation Easement (R7) – Endorsement**

Ken McDonald, Wildlife Administrator, explained FWP proposes to purchase a perpetual CE on approximately 15,390 acres of deeded land southwest of Wibaux. The 12,189 acres are currently owned by the landowners and are negotiating to purchase 3,200 acres, which could potentially be a part of this project. The property transitions from rolling hardwood draws and grasslands on the north, to badlands, and finally to extensive Wyoming big sagebrush grasslands on the south. Glendive Creek and several minor tributaries traverse the property. The ranch provides excellent year-round habitat for mule deer and is within sage-grouse general range. The ranch also supports antelope, sharp-tailed grouse, whitetail deer, occasional elk, and a diversity of nongame and sagebrush obligate species. A CE would protect healthy blocks of riparian and sagebrush habitats from conversion to other cover types, benefitting wildlife and agriculture, while also increasing public hunting and recreational opportunities. FWP is collaborating with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to potentially partner on funding for this proposed CE. FWP has not sought any public comment at this time. Upon endorsement from the Commission, FWP would conduct appropriate analysis, public review processes, and negotiations. To conserve the high resource values and public recreation opportunities on this land, FWP recommends endorsement by the Commission, allowing FWP to proceed with further development of this opportunity.

**Action:** *Commissioner Colton moved and Vice-Chairman Stuker seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission endorse the Horse Creek Complex conservation easement project, allowing FWP to continue negotiations and to conduct analysis and associated public review.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Nick Gevok, MWF, supports project.

**Action on Motion:** *Motion passed.*

*Vice-Chairman Stuker stated he had to adjourn from the meeting.*

### **24. Teton River Instream Flow Water Right Lease – Endorsement**

Eileen Ryce, Fisheries Administrator, explained the Water District Court appointed Water Commissioners to distribute water from the entire Teton River and its tributaries. Water rights in the lower Teton River that have not received their water historically should now receive the water due them resulting in improved flow in the lower Teton River. On April 14, 2017, the FW Commission endorsed the negotiation of water lease with a water user near the mouth of the Teton River. A second water user farther upstream has expressed interest in leasing waters to FWP to benefit the fishery; this water lease coupled with the first water lease, as well as the distribution of water by FW Commissioners would further help to lessen and possibly prevent the complete dewatering of the Teton River. FWP has statutory authority to temporarily change leased water rights to instream flow. The water right lease agreement would be subject to FW Commission approval at which time the public would have an opportunity to comment. To change the water rights to instream flow, FWP must make application to DNRC; this application would be noticed to the public, and potentially affected parties would have the opportunity to object to the changes to instream flow; DNRC would conduct an environmental review of the proposed change to instream flow. FWP recommends the FW Commission direct FWP Staff to negotiate a water-right lease agreement to restore and protect instream flow levels.

**Action:** *Commissioner Brower moved and Commissioner Aldrich seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission authorize FWP staff to start negotiating a water-right lease agreement for irrigation water rights from the Teton River to restore and protect instream flow water levels, subject to final approval by the Commission.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

**Action on Motion:** *Motion passed.*

### **25. Sunburst Lake Fishing Regulation Waiver (R1) – Final**

Eileen Ryce, Fisheries Administrator, explained the South Fork Flathead River Drainage comprises approximately half of the remaining genetically pure, interconnected populations of westslope cutthroat and provides a world class fishery resource. The South Fork Flathead Cutthroat Conservation Project has been systematically removing non-native fish and replacing them with pure westslope cutthroat. The

project to date has successfully chemically treated 14 lakes and 6 more lakes are being genetically swamped. Sunburst Lake is scheduled for treatment in September, 2017. Anglers have asked for limit waivers prior to previous treatments to allow more harvest of fish. Current bag limit is 3 trout per day. The Department recommends temporarily waiving limits on Sunburst Lake to build public support for the project and to answer anglers' desires to not waste fish.

*Action: Commissioner Aldrich moved and Commissioner Brower seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the Combined Trout daily and possession bag limits for Sunburst Lake be removed effective immediately through August 31, 2017.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

*Action on Motion: Motion passed.*

#### **26. Gold Creek Fishing Access Site Acquisition (R2) – Final**

Eileen Ryce, Fisheries Administrator, explained in 2012, FWP was allocated \$1,000,000 of funding through the Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP) to acquire and develop Fishing Access Sites (FASs) on the upper Clark Fork River. Roughly \$850,000 has been designated for development with approximately \$150,000 set aside for acquisitions. The goal is to add between 6-10 FASs to the Region 2 program over the next several years. A small site, approximately six-acres in Gold Creek (near Garrison) has been identified as the first parcel to acquire and develop. In 2016, the Commission endorsed acquiring the property with the goal of establishing a developed FAS. The appraised value is to be \$64,000; the owner has agreed to sell at the appraised price and has signed, along with the Department, a purchase agreement. A dual-purpose EA (acquisition and development) was developed for public review and comment ended May 23, 2017; comments favor the acquisition and development of the property; one late comment was received in support but have concerns with the riparian area. FWP recommends that the Commission approve the acquisition and development of the Gold Creek property as the property is located in a highly-desired river reach that currently lacks a developed public access site. By approving the acquisition and development of the site, FWP will have accomplished part of its plan to establish public FASs owned or managed by the Department on the upper Clark Fork River.

*Action: Commissioner Aldrich moved and Commissioner Brower seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the acquisition and development of the Gold Creek property to establish a fully developed Fishing Access Site.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

*Action on Motion: Motion passed.*

#### **27. Blacktail Meadows Fishing Access Site Proposed Easement (R3) – Endorsement**

Eileen Ryce, Fisheries Administrator, explained Blacktail Meadows FAS is located on the outskirts of Dillon, MT adjacent to the north exit of the I-15 interstate. The 14-acre site was donated to the Department in May of 2002 by the Swenson family. It was subsequently developed as a family fishing pond. The 14-acre site is bisected by a paved road providing access to local homes and businesses. The Department proposes to review a request to provide a road easement through the south side of the FAS in exchange for fee title to a small parcel of adjoining property. FWP would gain 48,400 square-feet of land that includes approximately 465 additional lineal-feet of Blacktail Creek frontage. In exchange, FWP would grant a road easement encompassing roughly 9,800 square-feet. The landowner has provided several letters of community support. Additional public scoping would be conducted by FWP during its environmental review process. FWP recommends that the Commission endorse the Department to proceed evaluating the proposal for a road easement.

*Action: Commissioner Brower moved and Commissioner Aldrich seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission endorse FWP's request to pursue the proposed road easement request at the Blacktail Meadows Fishing Access Site.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

*Action on Motion: Motion passed.*

#### **28. Redwater River Fishing Access Site Acquisition (R6) – Endorsement**

Eileen Ryce, Fisheries Administrator, explained this proposed acquisition is located at the confluence of the Missouri and Redwater Rivers. The Missouri River below Fort Peck Dam is 175 river miles long. Currently, only four FASs provide access to this underutilized and underappreciated reach of river. The proposed Redwater River FAS is in an 80-mile section of river where no FAS are present. This site is 18 miles downstream from the Lewis and Clark FAS and 62 miles upstream from the Culbertson FAS. The land is owned by BLM who is offering it to FWP at no cost under the Recreation and Public Purpose Act. There are approximately 376-acres within this BLM parcel; the FAS would encompass approximately 20-acres. The Department recommends the Commission to endorse the Department's request to pursue discussions with the BLM regarding the potential future management and development of an FAS on this parcel.

*Action: Commissioner Brower moved and Commissioner Aldrich seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission endorse FWP's request to pursue negotiations with the Bureau Land Management regarding the acquisition of land at the confluence of the Redwater and Missouri Rivers.*

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Nick Gevok, MWF, this is an underutilized and underappreciated stretch of the river; strongly support.

*Action on Motion: Motion passed.*

**29. Public Comment – For Issues Not On This Agenda – Adjournment**

Margaret Gorski, Stevensville, would like the Department to be more responsive to local communities when it comes to comprehensive recreation opportunities that include the development of FAS; with public lands adjacent to the river above the high-water mark; the public would be best served by viewing recreation opportunities rather than providing fishing access; not a priority or an easy issue; would like the Commission place this on a future agenda; there is a lot of controversy with a landowner in the Stevensville valley.

Nick Gevok, MWF, it is important to conduct data collection and have available to the sportsmen/women of Montana on last year's shoulder season; very essential.

Chairman Vermillion stated the Department will be giving the Commission an update at the August Commission meeting.

Tom Fieber, MTA, gave a lengthy comment on trapper education and furbearer/trapping itself.

Chairman Vermillion, Vore, Lee Anderson (Region I Captain Warden) and Fieber discussed different furbearer/trapping issues.

Larry Rattray, Proctor, endorses everything Fieber has said; would like to see back roads open to make it easier for the trappers.

McDonald stated starting in December, wolf hunting and trapping season will be set within the biennial season setting process.

*Action: Commissioner Brower moved and Commissioner Adrich seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion Passed.*

*The meeting adjourned 2:05 p.m.*



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Dan Vermillion, Chairman



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Martha Williams, Director