FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: May 9, 2013

Agenda Item: Big Springs Creek Fishing Access Site Acquisition – Bank of the Rockies Parcel

Division: Fisheries Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP is seeking the commission's endorsement to pursue the potential acquisition of a 19.7-acre parcel of land adjacent to Big Springs Creek near Lewistown. The parcel, currently owned by the Bank of the Rockies, would enable FWP to provide enhanced public fishing access and initiate the second phase of a stream restoration project. The Lewistown Trails Coordinating Committee and the City of Lewistown have already expressed support for acquiring the parcel. Purchase of the parcel would create a continuous public access corridor on both sides of the creek (approximately 1.65 miles) that extends from the Machler conservation easement downstream to the end of Carroll Trail FAS. Plans are to manage the area as a fishing access site and riparian area with the development of a trail by the City of Lewistown. Big Springs Creek is a popular trout stream but it's too small to float and it's often necessary for anglers to walk above the high water mark due to the depth of the stream. Public access to land adjacent to the river is therefore important. In 2007, FWP purchased a 62-acre conservation easement (Machler easement) upstream and to the east of this parcel for public access and to begin Phase 1 of a stream restoration project. This area of Big Spring Creek was channelized in 1961, reducing stream length by 3,800 feet. Down cutting resulted in an entrenched channel with very limited flood plain, limited pools and meanders. Stream straightening in this area caused so many problems that it was one of the main reasons that the Montana Streambed and Land Preservation Act (310 law) was enacted in 1975. The Bank of the Rockies parcel would enable FWP to pursue Phase 2 of the project (reestablishing stream meanders) and would allow public access to an additional 0.66 miles of Big Spring Creek on both banks. Funding sources for this potential acquisition have yet to be determined but could include a grant from the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust or funds from the FWP FAS acquisition account.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP would solicit public comment as a part of the acquisition process and environmental review.

Alternatives and Analysis

Acquiring this parcel would enhance public access to Big Springs Creek and provide for optimum routing of the stream restoration project. An alternative is to deny the endorsement request. Public fishing access to this section of the river would be limited due to the difficulty of staying within the high-water mark and FWP wouldn't able to conduct Phase 2 of the stream restoration project.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the commission endorse the request to pursue potential acquisition of the 19.7-acre Bank of the Rockies property. If the negotiations are successful, FWP would come back to the commission for final approval to acquire the parcel.

Proposed Motion

I move to endorse FWP's request to pursue potential acquisition of the Bank of the Rockies parcel on Big Springs Creek.