

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 14, 2011

Agenda Item: Fish Creek WMA (Region 2, Mineral County) – DNRC Fire Road Restoration Project

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Rule: X

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background (Brief description of the issue, decision to be made, history, etc.):

In the Fish Creek drainage and within portions of the Fish Creek WMA, FWP proposes to coordinate with Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) staff to obliterate existing roads, and exchange and abandon road easements as part of their Fish Creek Road Restoration Project. The proposed action would obliterate 2.8 miles of existing road on three road segments (segments D, F and I; Attachment B: Project Map) occupying sites at risk for failure or sediment delivery to streams. 2.5 miles of marginal access (segment E) would be obliterated on School trust lands. To facilitate removal of these roads, the DNRC would acquire 1.2 miles of easements (segments A, C, G and H) from FWP for alternative access routes to school trust lands and grant 0.8 miles of easements (segments B, J and K) to FWP for alternative access to Wildlife Management Area (WMA) lands. The DNRC would abandon 5.2 miles of existing easements and FWP would abandon .2 miles of existing easements that would no longer provide favorable access to respective ownerships. Fish Creek and its tributaries supports the strongest runs of bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout within the 120-mile reach of the middle Clark Fork watershed, with many of its streams also supporting genetically pure, resident westslope cutthroat trout. The Wig Creek drainage of the Project area provides important elk winter range for the Burdette Creek elk herd, as well as seasonal habitat for white-tailed deer, mule deer and moose.

Public Involvement Process & Results (Brief description of the type of public involvement and summary of what we heard from the public): DNRC and FWP jointly prepared a checklist EA and posted it for 30 days on the DNRC website. No public comment was received.

Alternatives and Analysis (Brief description of alternative solutions with analysis of the pros and cons of each): No-action would leave bare and little-used road surfaces to deliver sediment to streams and to represent a Best Management Practices (BMP) liability for FWP.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale (Brief description of our recommendation to the Commission and the reasons for it): If completed, the Fish Creek Fire Road Restoration Project would decrease the road density and associated maintenance on the Fish Creek WMA. It also would improve water quality within the drainage, and provide additional big game habitat security within important winter range.

Proposed Motion (Draft language the Commission could use to adopt the agency recommendation): Move that the Commission approve the Department's proposal to pursue the opportunity to decrease the road prism on the Fish Creek WMA.