

## ***FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET***

**Meeting Date:** August 18, 2011

**Agenda Item:** Madison Valley Deer Creek Access Easement

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Endorse Course of Action

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 10 minutes

### **Background**

FWP proposes to acquire a permanent footpath access corridor for hunters through the Carroll Ranch in to the neighboring U.S. Forest Service properties. The Carroll Ranch is currently under conservation easement with the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, but this easement does not contain a public access provision. The Carroll Ranch consists of 7,578 acres.

An access corridor through the Carroll Ranch property would be an extremely valuable addition to MFWP's ability to manage elk in the landscape. The hunting opportunities on the Carroll Ranch and adjoining USFS lands are significant: pronghorn, mule deer, black bear, mountain lion, elk, and wolves. Upland game birds using the property include Hungarian partridge, blue, spruce, and Franklin grouse.

Hunting access to private lands in the Madison Valley has been a critical issue for nearly 10 years as a burgeoning elk population has resulted in game damage complaints and wildlife conflicts. FWP's ability to manage this elk herd has been hampered by limited private land hunting access opportunities, although private land access opportunities in the area have improved over the last four years.

Hunting access to public lands in the Madison Valley is also of critical concern. There are only four USFS trailheads along a 50-mile section of the east Madison Valley. The proposed Deer Creek Access through the Carroll Ranch would fall 5 miles south of one access and 8 miles north of another, thereby providing another entry point in what is currently a 13-mile stretch of USFS lands publicly accessible only through trailheads located 13-miles apart. This access would allow public hunters reasonable access to Wolf Creek, a major drainage known to support elk during the fall big game season, that has generally been accessible only to landowners in the Rising Sun subdivision or their guests, or hunters accessing this area from the Sun Ranch.

### **Public Involvement Process & Results**

There has been no public involvement to date, but it is likely that there will be support from the public once endorsed by the commission.

### **Alternatives and Analysis**

The primary purpose of this purchase is to secure legal perpetual public footpath access across the Carroll Ranch to adjacent public lands. The alternative is that hunters will continue to have to access public lands to the east of the Carroll Ranch only by using public lands access trailheads located 5-8 miles away.

### **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends approval by the FWP Commission to proceed with efforts to purchase a perpetual footpath access easement from the Carroll Ranch.

### **Proposed Motion**

I move the commission endorse FWP's recommendation to begin negotiations to acquire a perpetual footpath access easement across the Carroll Ranch to adjacent public lands.

