Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

DECISION NOTICE

Acquisition of Jamison Property
Addition to Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area

June 2, 2008

Proposal

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to purchase fee title and accept management responsibilities for an approximately 296-acre parcel (currently held by Sherrie Jamison), located 3 miles northwest of Anaconda in Deer Lodge County. The parcel is located in Section 20 west half, Township 5 North, Range 11 West. The land, which will be managed as an addition to the Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area (WMA) complex, lies within 2 miles of the existing 162-acre Blue-eyed Nellie WMA, as well as within 2 miles of Garrity and Lost Creek WMAs.

The proposed acquisition would proceed in two phases. Phase I, 220 acres adjoining Forest Service lands on Stucky Ridge, would close in June 2008. This phase will be funded primarily ($757,000) with FWP's Sheep License Auction Fund and Habitat Montana Program as well as with $16,000 in donations from the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep (FNAWS), the Five Valleys Chapter of the Safari Club, and the Anaconda Wildlife EXPO. The Phase II purchase would occur in January 2009 and would transfer the remaining approximately 76 acres to FWP at a price of $262,500. American Lands Conservancy (ALC) on behalf of FWP has applied for a grant from the Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP) and proposes that NRDP fund Phase II.

The purpose of this proposal is to preserve critical habitat for the Lost Creek bighorn herd. The property is made up of intermountain grasslands on a long grassy bench and an aspen filled gulch. Bighorn sheep, mule deer, and elk use the property extensively. Under this proposal Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks would acquire critical wildlife habitat, of special importance for bighorn, and important public access to Stucky Ridge.

Montana Environmental Policy Act Process

FWP prepared an Environmental Assessment pursuant to MEPA. FWP made this document available during a 33-day public comment period that began on April 25, 2008 and ended on May 27, 2008. FWP advertised the public comment period on the proposed project by legal notice entitled "Public Comment Sought" (Appendix A) in the following newspapers (dates published): The Independent Record (Helena; Apr 25, May 2); Missoulian (Apr 25, May 2); Montana Standard (Butte; Apr 25, May 2); and Anaconda Leader (Apr 25, May 2). This document was available in its entirety on FWP's Internet web site (www.fwp.mt.gov, under "Recent Public Notices") beginning April 24, 2008.

A public hearing regarding this acquisition was conducted by FWP in Anaconda on May 12, 2008 at 7 p.m. at the Lee Metcalf Center and was attended by 18 people.

FWP distributed copies of the draft EA (or postcard notification of its availability) to 38 agencies, private organizations, and persons (including adjacent property owners), before the comment period began. Email notification of the EA's availability was sent to 37 people in 7 State of Montana agencies. Copies were distributed at the public meeting in Anaconda, and FWP responded to additional requests as they were received.

Summary of Public Comment

Eighteen citizens and two FWP personnel attended the public hearing on May 12, 2008 in Anaconda. Fifteen individuals testified at the hearing, including representatives from the Anaconda Sportsmen's Club, the Montana Wildlife Federation, the Foundation for North American for Wild Sheep (FNAWS), and the Anaconda Wildlife EXPO. All spoke in favor of the project.

Casey Johnson of FNAWS read from a letter from the Montana Chapter that was strongly in favor of the purchase. Chris Marchion, representing the Montana Wildlife Federation (MWF), noted that MWF was an early supporter of the Sheep Auction and that this was an appropriate place to spend the dollars. Fred Boyer, an officer of the Anaconda Wildlife EXPO and noted area wildlife artist, said that the Jamison property was one of the best pieces of habitat in the Anaconda area and that additional access to Stucky Ridge was critical. Lorrie Thomas, president of the Anaconda Sportsmen's Club, noted that purchase of the Jamison property would stop a major subdivision in key wildlife habitat.

Two people submitted emailed comments during the comment period; they also voiced support. Bert Otis of Emigrant, Montana stated, "I would like to voice my support for the Jamison Property Acquisition."

Outside of the EA process the Natural Resource Damage Program received at least 10 letters of support for the Jamison project. Letters of support were received from the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the Montana Wildlife Federation, Safari Club International (Five Valleys Chapter), the Public Lands/Water Access Association, Skyline Sportsmen's Association, Anaconda Sportsmen's Club, Five Valleys Land Trust, Anaconda Wildlife Expo, and the Anaconda-Deerlodge County Commissioners.

No comments against the proposal were heard or received during the comment period. Purchase of the Jamison property by FWP clearly has substantial public support in the Anaconda area and statewide.

In addition to the comments received during the MEPA process, Senate Bill 529 (2005 Montana Legislature) requires noxious weed inspections and weed management agreements for certain land transfers to non-federal public agencies. The Anaconda-Deer Lodge Weed Coordinator will

be contacted if the project acquisition proposal is approved, and a weed management plan would developed by FWP in concert with the county.

Decision

Utilizing the Environmental Assessment and public comment, a decision must be rendered by FWP, which addresses the concerns and issues identified for the proposed project. In light of public comments and internal agency review, I accept the draft Environmental Assessment as final. The proposed acquisition received support from all in attendance at the public hearing in Anaconda as well as two individuals who wrote emails of support, and no other comments have been received.

FWP recognizes the value of acquiring critical wildlife habitat when the opportunity arises. With the approval of this acquisition, the property's value as wildlife habitat will be preserved and enhanced and the threat of development will be nullified. No adverse effects are expected on the diversity or abundance of game species, non-game species or threatened and endangered species. Public access and recreational opportunities will be enhanced.

In consideration of these facts, I am pleased to recommend that the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission approve the acquisition of the 296-acre Jamison property for addition to the Blue-Eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area as proposed.

Mack Long
Region 2 Supervisor

6/2/08
Date

Appendix A.

PUBLIC COMMENT SOUGHT

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) seeks public review of its proposal to acquire a 295-acre private parcel nearby the Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area (WMA), northwest of Anaconda in Deer Lodge County. The purpose would be to acquire critical winter range for bighorn sheep and elk. A draft environmental assessment (EA) has been prepared for this proposal. FWP will hold a public hearing in Anaconda on May 12 (Monday) at 7:00 p.m. at the Lee Metcalf Center. The EA may be obtained by mail from Region 2 FWP, 3201 Spurgin Rd., Missoula 59804; by phoning 406-542-5540; by emailing shrose@mt.gov; or by viewing FWP's Internet website www.fwp.mt.gov ("Recent Public Notices," beginning April 25). Comments should be directed to Ray Vinkey by mail to the address above; by phoning 406-859-1704; or emailing rvinkey@mt.gov. Comments must be received by FWP no later than 5 p.m., May 27, 2008.