Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405

March 30, 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

The enclosed draft Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for the proposed grazing lease agreement for the Ear Mountain Wildlife Management (WMA) Area located west of Choteau, Montana, and is submitted for your consideration. Questions and comments will be accepted through April 19, 2009. The agreement would allow cattle to be utilized as a management tool to maintain vegetative quality on the WMA by stimulating regrowth of native grasses and forbs for the benefit of wildlife.

If you need additional copies of the draft EA, please contact Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks in Great Falls at 406-454-5840 or at the Freezout lake office at 406-467-2488. Copies of the draft EA are also available on the Fish, Wildlife & Park website at http://fwp.mt.gov

Please send any written comments to the following address:

Ear Mountain WMA Grazing Lease
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
PO Box 488
Fairfield, MT 59436

Or email comments to: blonner@mt.gov

Sincerely,

Graham Taylor
Acting Regional Supervisor
Great Falls, MT

Draft
Environmental Assessment

Ear Mountain Wildlife Management Area - Salmond Ranch & Gollehon Ranch Grazing Agreement

March 2009

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Draft Environmental Assessment

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes the following actions on Ear Mountain Wildlife Management Area (EMWMA):

The proposed action would continue a rest-rotation grazing plan for cattle on the WMA. Ear Mountain WMA (3080 acres) is currently divided into two pastures (north and south – Figures 1 & 2) in which two different lessees have been permitted to graze cattle in accordance with grazing lease stipulations. The proposed action would follow previous grazing lease requirements (Appendix A) with the addition of the lessee's responsibility of aiding in EMWMA fence maintenance during cattle presence and providing public hunting access on their respective properties.

2. Agency Authority and Relevant Plan:

Fish, Wildlife & Parks will be the Agency Authority for the proposed action. Ear Mountain WMA is managed for highly productive, diverse vegetative communities that will provide the best possible quality forage and cover for native wildlife species, with emphasis on spring, fall and winter range habitat for mule deer and bighorn sheep. Ear Mountain WMA also provides public access to the East Front Range and diversity of hunting and other public recreational opportunities.

3. Name of Project:

Ear Mountain Wildlife Management Area - Salmond Ranch & Gollehon Ranch Grazing Agreement

4. Anticipated Schedule:

Public Comment Period for draft EA: March 30 through 5:00 pm April 19, 2009
Decision Notice Published: Late April
FWP Commission meeting: May 14th
Commence Grazing: June 1, 2009

5. Location:

The proposed project is located on the entire EMWMA within Teton County. The grazing system will be divided into two pastures (North pasture – 960 acres; South pasture – 2,210 acres). Legal descriptions of each pasture are as follows:

Table 1. Legal Description - North Pasture

Lewis and Clark County	
Township, Range	**Section**
T 24N, R 8W	S 4: SW1/4SE1/4; S1/2SW1/4
T 24N, R 8W	S 5: SE1/4SW1/4; S1/2SE1/4
T 24N, R 8W	S 8: E1/2NW1/4; NE1/4; N1/2SE1/4; SE1/4SE1/4 and portions north of the existing fence line in SW1/4SE1/4, SE1/4SW1/4 and NE1/4SW1/4
T 24N, R 8W	S 9: W1/2

Table 2. Legal Description - South Pasture

Lewis and Clark County	
Township, Range	**Section**
T 24N, R 8W	S 7: Lot 3 (NW ¼ SW ¼), Lot 4 (SW ¼ SW ¼), E ½ SW ¼, SE ¼
T 24N, R 8W	S 8: That portion that lies south of the existing fence line between the NW corner of government lot 1 in section 17 and the SE corner of the SW ¼ NW ¼ of said section 8.
T 24N, R 8W	S 17: Lot 1 (NE ¼ NE ¼), Lot 2 (SE ¼ NE ¼), Lot 3 (NE ¼ SE ¼), Lot 4 (SE ¼ SE ¼), W ½ E ½, W ½
T 24N, R 8W	S 18: E ½, E ½ NW ¼
T 24N, R 8W	S 19: E ½ NE ¼, NE ¼ SE ¼
T 24N, R 8W	S 20: Lot 1 (NE ¼ NE ¼), Lot 2 (NW ¼ NE ¼), Lot 3 (NE ¼ NW ¼), Lot 4 (SE ¼ NW ¼), Lot 5 (SW ¼ NE ¼), Lot 6 (SE ¼ NE ¼), Lot 7 (NE ¼ SW ¼), Lot 8 (SE ¼ SW ¼), W ½ W ½

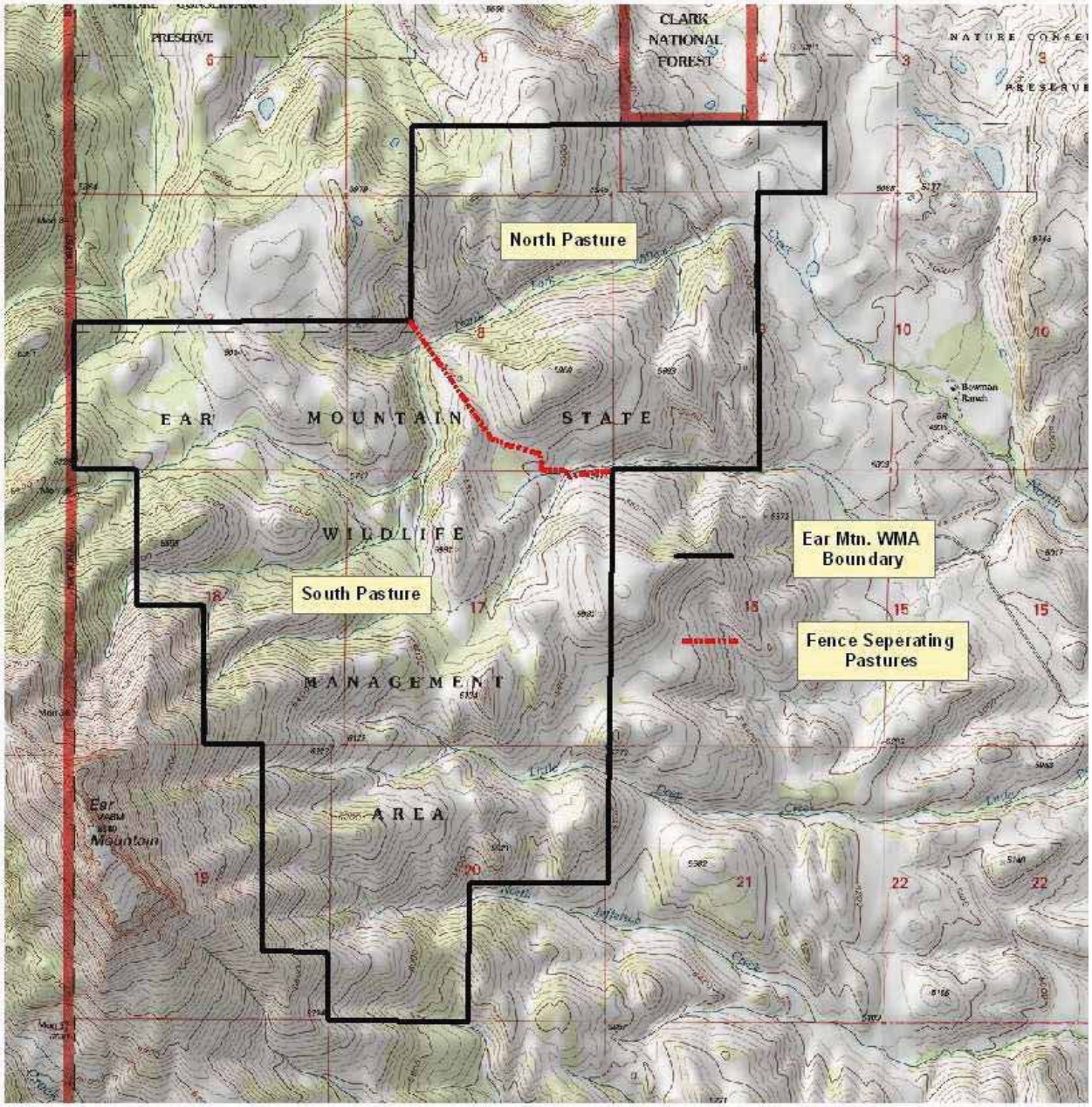

Figure 1. Topographic map portraying Ear Mountain WMA and associated grazing pastures.

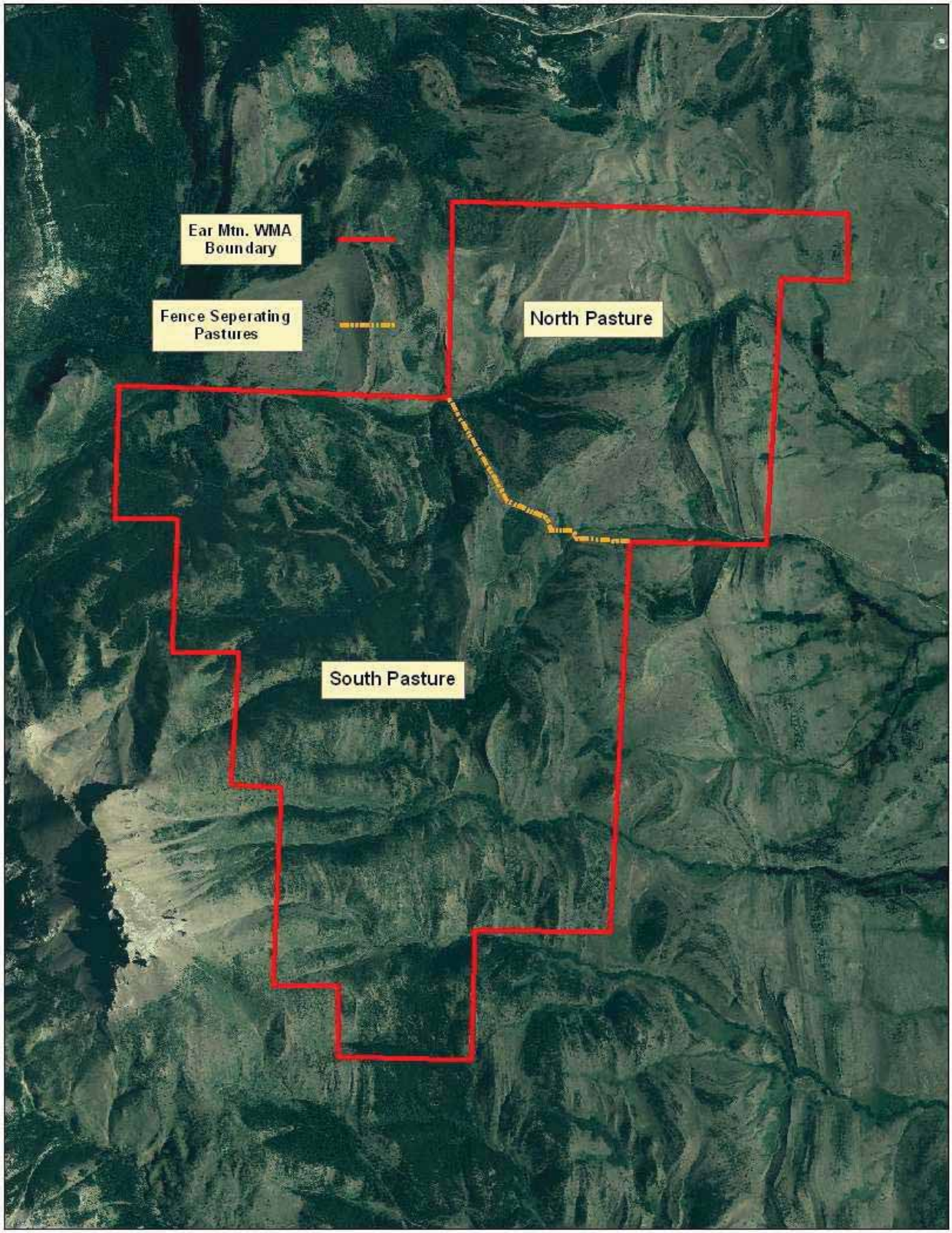

Figure 2. Aerial photo portraying Ear Mountain WMA and associated grazing pastures.

6. Project size:

	Approx. Acres		Approx. Acres
(a) Developed:		(e) Productive:	
Residential	0	Irrigated Cropland	0
Industrial	0	Dry cropland	0
(b) Open Space / Woodlands/Recreation	0	Forestry	930
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	90	Rangeland	1,750
(d) Floodplain	0	Other	310

7. Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.

(a) Permits: None

(b) Funding for proposed project elements:

Fencing – As part of the agreement, fence maintenance will be carried out by each lessee and FWP. Fish, Wildlife & Parks will provide necessary materials and lessees will provide time and effort in regards to maintenance costs. Fish, Wildlife & Parks will also help with time and effort on maintenance as time permits. Fish, Wildlife & Parks will pay lessees at the hourly rate of $10.00 for time and effort spent on fence maintenance. When the grazing rental payment is due from the lessee to FWP, the total cost of maintenance through each lessee (number of hours worked as well as any necessary materials provided) will be subtracted from the payment. Fence maintenance costs through the lessee will not exceed $500.00. Fish, Wildlife & Parks does not anticipate significant fence maintenance since most existing fences on the WMA are in good condition.

Rental Payment – The FWP grazing rate (cost/animal unit month) is based upon the average annual grazing fees for Montana as reported by the Montana Department of Agriculture in their annual report. The 2009 grazing rate is $18.10 per animal unit month (AUM).

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities: None

8. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

Fish, Wildlife & Parks' proposed action is directed at helping to maintain the vigor of vegetation on the EMWMA for the benefit of wildlife. The proposal also provides opportunity for adjacent livestock operations for good cattle grazing pasture. Year-round and seasonal forage for mule deer and bighorn sheep and other big game will be maintained. Public hunting access on the lessee's property will also be incorporated within the grazing lease. Lessees have the right to develop and control hunter access, but

must allow reasonable hunting opportunity as well as keep record of allowed hunter access.

Grazing Agreement

Prior to acquisition from FWP in 1976, livestock grazing on the land was the length of the growing season, continuous from year to year. From 1976-1991, EMWMA was not used as livestock grazing pasture. Beginning in 1991, a rest-rotation grazing system was established with the Salmond Ranch for the 2,120-acre south pasture in order to improve vegetative quality on EMWMA. In 1992, a similar grazing system was established with the Gollehon Ranch for the 960-acre north pasture. Both pastures have traditionally followed a rest-rotation pattern of grazing one month before seed ripe the first year (June), one month after seed ripe the following year (August) and a year of complete rest the third year. Recent vegetation monitoring surveys (summer and fall 2008) on EMWMA continue to show overall good vegetative conditions on the WMA. Beginning in 2009, the Salmond Ranch would be allowed to graze June 1 – June 30. The Salmond Ranch can graze up to 391 AUMs annually on the south pasture in exchange for payment at the rental rate of $18.10 per AUM for 2009. The Gollehon Ranch in 2009 would be allowed to graze from August 1 – August 31. No more than 70 AUMs annually on the north pasture will be allowed in exchange for payment at the rental rate of $18.10 per AUM for 2009. The proposed grazing plan for each pasture would be effective for three years, with contract renewal and/or modifications contingent on future management goals on EMWMA. See Appendix A for the complete proposed grazing plan.

9. Alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action -
Fish, Wildlife & Parks would not utilize the grazing management plan on the EMWMA. Lower and less quality forage production on EMWMA would be expected over the long-term. The Salmond and Gollehon Ranches would be required to find additional grazing pasture elsewhere.

Alternative B: Proposed Action -
Fish, Wildlife & Parks would implement a grazing plan on the EMWMA. The establishment and maintenance of the proposed grazing plan would allow cattle to be utilized as a management tool to maintain vegetative quality on the WMA by stimulating regrowth of native grasses and forbs for the benefit of wildlife. The Salmond Ranch and Gollehon Ranch would benefit from the availability of additional early and late summer pasture for their cattle. Public hunting opportunity would be allowed through each lessee's respective properties.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

The following analysis focuses on the potential impacts of Alternative B – Proposed Action.

1. **Evaluation of the impacts of the <u>Proposed Action</u> including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.**

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. LAND RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. **Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?			X		No	1a.
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X		No	1b.
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				

1a and 1b. Cattle usage (up to 461 total AUM's) and the short grazing period will not cause any measurable damage to soils except possibly where cattle develop trail systems and concentrate to travel and locate water.

2. AIR Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13 (c).)		x				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		x				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. ***For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regulations? (Also see 2a.)		N/A				

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

3. WATER Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. *Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?						
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		N/A				
m. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		N/A				

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X			4a
b. Alteration of a plant community?			X			4b
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?		X			Yes	4e
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		N/A				

4a/b. The grazing design should increase productivity and abundance of most grass species located on the WMA. Some loss in grass biomass may occur after cattle are moved through the WMA area but this is seen as temporary since the rest-rotation grazing schedule is designed to overall enhance vegetation productivity in the system. Overall plant diversity within the affected area is not expected to change from pre-project levels.

4e. Currently, there are established clusters of spotted knapweed and leafy spurge on the acreage included within the grazing plan. The grazing system is anticipated to reduce the spread of some noxious weed communities by increasing the productivity of several native grass species and timing the grazing of cattle on the WMA to coincide with the palatability of emerging weeds in the spring. In addition, FWP will continue to manage existing noxious weed infestations on its properties per the guidance of the 2008 FWP Integrated Noxious Weeds Management Plan.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

** 5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			X			5b
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?			X		Yes	5e
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				5f
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?			X			5g
h. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		N/A				
i. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		N/A				

5b. The grazing system anticpates improvement of the quality of habitat for wildlife. Production of fall regrowth may cause an increase in the number of deer and elk on some portions of the WMA during the winter and spring seasons.

5e. Perimeter and interior fences are already established for this pasture system. To mitigate their impact, wildlife friendly fence designs have been employed so that wildlife can either pass above or below barbed wire strands.

5f. Montana's Fish and Wildlife Conservation Strategy identifies 11 species of greatest conservation need associated with the EMWMA habitat type. However, no significant direct adverse effects on these species are expected.

5g. Some resident game and nongame species, to include mule deer, black and grizzly bear, elk, mountain grouse and small mammals, will be affected by cattle presence and congestion for a limited time. These species will likely avoid the heavy use areas but will return to the area when cattle presence is diminished.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				

7. LAND USE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				

8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		N/A				

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

Chemical spraying is part of FWP's integrated weed management program to manage noxious weeds. Certified professionals would utilize permitted chemicals in accordance with product labels and as provided for under state law.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				

10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. **Define projected revenue sources			X			10e
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.			X			10f

10e. Fish, Wildlife & Parks will be paid $18.10 per AUM through each lessee (minus reimbursement to lessee for fence maintenance time and effort).

10f. Fish, Wildlife & Parks anticipates minimal maintenance costs for existing fences. Any future maintenance costs will be absorbed into the regular operation and maintenance accounts for the WMA.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

** 11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				11a
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report.)		X				
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		N/A				

11a. Historically, these pastures have been grazed by cattle. Cattle will be present for short periods of time each year (1 month annually for each pasture). The WMA is located in a rural setting and the presence of cattle will not be something new for the public. Currently, the EMWMA and do and will continue to allow hunting on their respective properties. The grazing plan is designed so that no cattle will be present on the WMA after the beginning of September.

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		N/A				

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

C. SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a	IMPACT *					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects, which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		N/A				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		N/A				

The proposed project will not conflict with any local, state, or federal regulations. Furthermore, no substantial controversy or public debate is expected by continuation of the grazing plan since no adverse affects are anticipated and the grazing will benefit the EMWMA and local wildlife populations and their habitat.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or cannot be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM).

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

PART III. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW, CONTINUED

2. **Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:**

   A grazing lease signed by both parties will be the guiding document for the duration of the grazing plan on EMWMA. The agreement will be valid for an initial 3-year period. Fish, Wildlife and Parks will continue to monitor vegetative quality and quantity on both pastures throughout this time period and at the end of the 3-year period a decision will be made to either continue as is or modify the existing grazing plan based on vegetative conditions.

PART IV. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The proposed grazing management plan between FWP and the Salmond Ranch and Gollehon Ranch will lend toward better habitat conditions on EMWMA. Livestock will be used in a rest-rotation grazing system to improve vegetative conditions for wildlife.

The components of this project will not have significant impacts on the physical environment (i.e. geological features, fish and wildlife, and water resources) or the human environment (i.e. land use, recreation, and utilities). Most impacts identified in the previous pages are minor and are of short duration. Expected long-term consequences from the completion of the grazing plan will improved range conditions for wildlife.

PART V. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. **Public involvement:**

   The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

   - Public notices in the *Choteau Acantha, Fairfield Sun Times* and *The Great Falls Tribune*;
   - Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: http://fwp.mt.gov.

   In addition, copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed grazing plan. Copies of this draft EA will be available for public review at FWP Region 4 Headquarters in Great Falls, at the FWP Field office in Fairfield and on the FWP web site.

   This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts.

2. Comment period:

The public comment period will extend for (21) twenty-one days beginning March 30, 2009. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 pm, April 19, 2009 and can be mailed to the address below:

Ear Mountain Grazing Lease
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
PO Box 488
Fairfield, MT 59436

Or email: blonner@mt.gov

PART VI. EA PREPARATION

1. **Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)?**
   No.

   If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

   Based upon the above assessment, which has identified a very limited number of minor impacts from the proposed action, an EIS in not required and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of review.

2. **Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**

   Brent Lonner, FWP wildlife biologist, Fairfield
   Graham Taylor, FWP Acting Region Four Supervisor, Great Falls
   Steve Knapp, FWP Habitat Bureau Chief, Helena
   Mike Frisina, FWP Range Coordinator, Butte

3. **List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:**

   Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks: Habitat Bureau & Wildlife Division
   U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management

APPENDICES

A. Draft Grazing Plan – Salmond Ranch and Gollehon Ranch

APPENDIX A

Draft Grazing Plan – Salmond Ranch

For the 2009 grazing season, the south pasture (see Figures 1 & 2 and Table 2 for legal description) shall be open to not more than 391 AUMs from June 1, 2009 through June 30, 2009. Only cattle may be grazed on this pasture. Fence maintenance prior to cattle entry will be the responsibility of the lessee. Fish, Wildlife & Parks will provide necessary materials for maintenance and also help with time and effort on maintenance as time permits. Salt or mineral is the responsibility of the lessee in approved sites. The grazing rate (cost/AUM) will be based upon the average annual grazing fees for Montana as reported by the Montana Department of Agriculture in their annual report. The grazing rate for the 2009 grazing season is $18.10/AUM. A single annual payment (minus the cost of maintenance completed by the lessee) shall be made to the Department no later than November 1, 2009.

For the 2010 grazing season, the south pasture (see Figures 1 & 2 and Table 2 for legal description) shall be open to not more than 391 AUMs from August 1, 2010 through August 31, 2010. Only cattle may be grazed on this pasture. Fence maintenance prior to cattle entry will be the responsibility of the lessee. Fish, Wildlife & Parks will provide necessary materials for maintenance and also help with time and effort on maintenance as time permits. Salt or mineral is the responsibility of the lessee in approved sites. The grazing rate (cost/AUM) will be based upon the average annual grazing fees for Montana as reported by the Montana Department of Agriculture in their annual report. This figure will likely be available no earlier than February 1, 2010. A single annual payment (minus the cost of maintenance completed by the lessee) shall be made to the Department no later than November 1, 2010.

Browse and herbaceous forage conditions will be assessed after the 2009 and 2010 grazing seasons. Any adjustments to the grazing prescription will be made at that time. No grazing shall occur during the 2011grazing season.

These grazing schemes (for the years 2009, 2010 and 2011) conform to conclusions and prescriptions in the March 1999 “South Pasture-Ear Mountain WMA Livestock Grazing Analysis” by Frisina and Kujala.

Draft Grazing Plan – Gollehon Ranch

For the 2009 grazing season, the north pasture (see Figures 1 & 2 and Table 1 for legal description) shall be open to not more than 70 AUMs from August 1, 2009 through August 31, 2009. Only cattle may be grazed on this pasture. Fence maintenance prior to cattle entry will be the responsibility of the lessee. Fish, Wildlife & Parks will provide necessary materials for maintenance and also help with time and effort on maintenance as time permits. Salt or mineral is the responsibility of the lessee in approved sites. The grazing rate (cost/AUM) will be based upon the average annual grazing fees for Montana as reported by the Montana Department of Agriculture in their annual report. The grazing rate for the 2009 grazing season is $18.10/AUM.

A single annual payment (minus the cost of maintenance completed by the lessee) shall be made to the Department no later than November 1, 2009.

For the 2010 grazing season, the north pasture (see Figures 1 & 2 and Table 1 for legal description) shall be open to not more than 70 AUMs from June 1, 2010 through June 30, 2010. Only cattle may be grazed on this pasture. Fence maintenance prior to cattle entry will be the responsibility of the lessee. Fish, Wildlife & Parks will provide necessary materials for maintenance and also help with time and effort on maintenance as time permits. Salt or mineral is the responsibility of the lessee in approved sites. The grazing rate (cost/AUM) will be based upon the average annual grazing fees for Montana as reported by the Montana Department of Agriculture in their annual report. This figure will likely be available no earlier than February 1, 2010. A single annual payment (minus the cost of maintenance completed by the lessee) shall be made to the Department no later than November 1, 2010.

Browse and herbaceous forage conditions will be assessed after the 2009 and 2010 grazing seasons. Any adjustments to the grazing prescription will be made at that time. No grazing shall occur during the 2011grazing season.

These grazing schemes (for the years 2009, 20010 and 2011) conform to conclusions and prescriptions in the July 2001 "North Pasture-Ear Mountain WMA Livestock Grazing Analysis" by Frisina and Kujala.