



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region One
490 North Meridian Rd.
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Ref:JS056-12
June 28, 2012

TO: * Governor's Office, Attn: Mike Volesky, PO Box 200801, Helena, 59620-0801
* Environmental Quality Council, PO Box 20, Helena, 59620-1704
* Dept. of Environmental Quality, Planning, Prevention & Assistance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901
* Dept. of Environmental Quality, Permitting Compliance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901
* Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Director's Office – Reg Peterson, Legal Unit – Jessica Snyder; Rebecca Cooper
* Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, PO Box 278, Pablo, 59855
* DNRC, PO Box 201601, Helena, 59620-1601 (Patty Greene)
* DNRC, Steve Frye, Kalispell
* Montana Historical Society, SHPO, 225 North Roberts, Veteran's Memorial Building, Helena, 59620
* Montana State Library, 1515 East Sixth Ave., Helena, 59620-1800
* Adam McLane, Montana Environmental Information Center, PO Box 1184, Helena, 59624
George Ochenski, 4 Harrison Road, Helena, MT 59601
* Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation, PO Box 728, Libby, 59923
* Montana State Parks Association, PO Box 699, Billings, 59103
* Joe Gutkoski, President, Montana River Action Network, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, 59715
* Representatives Janna Taylor, Joe Read, Scott Reichner & Mark Blasdel
* Senators Carmine Bowbray, Shannon Augare & Verdell Jackson
Flathead County Commissioners, 800 S Main Street, Kalispell, MT 59901
Interested parties

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), Region One, has written a draft environmental assessment (EA) for the purpose of seeking public comment for a proposed action to contract farming on the North Shore State Park/WMA in a share-cropping agreement for the benefit of wildlife, especially migrating waterfowl and upland birds, but other wildlife as well, including white-tailed deer, small game, and songbirds, and to also control weeds on the property.

The draft EA is out for a 2-week public review through July 12, 2012. A copy is enclosed for your review. Please contact Area Wildlife Biologist John Vore, FWP, 490 N Meridian Road, Kalispell, MT 59901, (406) 751-4584 or e-mail to jvore@mt.gov with questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Jim Satterfield Jr., Ph.D.
Regional Supervisor

Enclosure

* E-mailed

**Draft Environmental Assessment
for
North Shore State Park/
Wildlife Management Area Farming**

June 2012



***Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks***

Draft Environmental Assessment MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of proposed state action:** The proposed action involves a 3-year share-cropping agreement with a private operator for farming to improve food and cover for wildlife, particularly spring migrating waterfowl and upland birds, on the North Shore State Park/Wildlife Management Area (SP/WMA).
2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
3. **Name of project:** North Shore SP/WMA Farming
4. **Name, address, and phone number of project sponsor (if other than the agency):** N/A
5. **Anticipated schedule:** The project would begin in the fall of 2012 and run until the fall of 2015.
6. **Location affected by proposed action:** The proposed action would occur on the North Shore Wildlife Management Area in Flathead County, Montana, T27N, R20W, S21.

7. **Project size:**

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>0</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
(b) Open Space/	<u>0</u>	Dry cropland	<u>89</u>
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	<u>0</u>	Rangeland	<u>0</u>
Areas		Other	<u>0</u>

8. **Other local, state or federal agency with overlapping or additional jurisdiction:**

(a) Permits:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permits</u>
N/A	

(b) Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
N/A	Revenue Neutral

(c) Other overlapping or additional jurisdictional responsibilities:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
N/A	

9. Narrative summary: This proposal is to contract farming on the North Shore SP/WMA in a share-cropping agreement for the benefit of wildlife, especially migrating waterfowl and upland birds, but other wildlife as well including white-tailed deer, small game and songbirds, and to also control weeds on the property. During 2012-2013, farming of winter wheat will occur on 89 acres, with a portion of the crop, but not less than 15%, to be left standing in the field as food and cover for wildlife. During 2014-2015, because other wetland enhancement work will be ongoing, farming will be reduced to 72 acres in three fields that will be crop rotated between winter wheat, spring wheat or barley, and peas. Again, a portion of the small grain crop, but not less than 15% of the total acreage, or 10 acres, will be left standing in the field for wildlife. In addition, an approximately 40-foot buffer strip adjoining the Highway 83 easement to the north and the neighbor to the west will be planted into a dense nesting cover (DNC) mix of 4 wheatgrasses. The contractor will be required to manage weeds on the fields, the DNC strip, access roads, and parking lot.

10. Description and analysis of alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action - If the proposed action is not implemented, quality and thus function of food and cover for ducks, pheasants, white-tailed deer, and ground-nesting songbirds will deteriorate and noxious weeds will increase. Farming by contractor of food plots and nesting cover fields will not be done, which would negatively impact wildlife populations and hunter opportunities. It would also lead to an increase in weeds on the property or an increased cost for FWP to control weeds.

Alternative B: Proposed Action - The proposed action would utilize the time, fuel, and equipment of a private agricultural contractor to enhance wildlife habitat by providing food and cover at no expense to FWP. This action would result in negligible environmental impacts associated with customary farming activities on the SP/WMA and by operators on surrounding private lands.

PART II. PREDICTED ENVIRONMENTAL OUTCOMES

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Alternatives, including secondary and cumulative impacts on the physical and human environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> 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			A
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X			A
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				
f. Other:						

A – Common standard cultivation practices associated with farming will intentionally disturb surface soils to prepare sites for reseeding. Minimal wind and water erosion is unavoidable.

2. <u>AIR</u> 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 13c.)			X			A
b. Creation of objectionable odors?			X			A
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 regs? (Also see 2a.)		X				
f. Other:						

A – Diesel exhaust and short-term dust will cause a temporary impact to air quality that will be localized within the SP/WMA boundaries.

3. <u>WATER</u> 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			A
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?		X				
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.)		X				
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.)		X				
n. Other:						

A – Turbidity may increase on low spots in cultivated fields following uncommon, heavy rainfall events.

4. <u>VEGETATION</u> 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	N/A	A
b. Alteration of a plant community?				X	N/A	A
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				A
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X			E
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:						

A – The proposed action will have a positive impact on the diversity, productivity, and abundance of desirable plant species, as it is the primary purpose for the proposed action. The grasses and crops impacted by the proposed action will be more vigorous and productive.

E – This action is being proposed as a method to enhance vigor of desirable vegetation, making it more resistant to invasion and propagation of noxious weeds. Some seeds of noxious weeds will likely be transported off-site in the hay crop.

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	N/A	A
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?				X	N/A	A
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest, or other human activity)?			X			G
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.)		X				H
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.)		X				
j. Other:						

A – Impacts will be positive toward the diversity and abundance of wildlife species that currently inhabit the SP/WMA. The proposed action has a principle objective of improving wildlife habitat.

G – Minimal segments of wildlife populations will be disturbed by some activities associated with the proposed action. Constraints on timing of activities will be enforced to minimize stress to wildlife.

H – No T&E species will be affected by the project.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> 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			A
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				
e. Other:						

A – The sounds from operating tractors and associated equipment will be audible while they are in use. Noise levels will be similar to what is created in the surrounding areas that are also farmed, and will be sporadic, short-term, and during daylight hours.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> 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. Conflict 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				
e. Other:						

8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> 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			A
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.)		X				
e. Other:						

A – Diesel fuel, motor oil, and antifreeze could be spilled in the event of an accident or mechanical failure. The maximum total amount spilled would be limited to the operating capacity of a tractor.

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> 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				
f. Other:						

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. 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. An effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. 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. An increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. Define projected revenue sources		X				E
f. Define projected maintenance costs.		X				F
g. Other:						

E – The proposed action is revenue neutral.

F – No maintenance costs are expected. An intent of the proposal is to eliminate FWP maintenance costs.

11. <u>AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> 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				
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.)		X				
e. Other:						

12. <u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u> 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 12a.)		X				
e. Other:						

The agricultural practices to be used in the proposed action will be the same customary practices used on the same sites for many decades. No previously undisturbed sites will be farmed. If previously undiscovered resources were discovered, FWP would consult with the State Historic Preservation Office for guidance and assistance.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u> Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	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.)		X				
g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

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

While some farming activities such as planting of spring wheat, barley, and peas, and fertilization and early weed spraying needs to be done in the spring, any farming activities that can wait until after July 15, such as summer weed spraying, etc., will do so to avoid disturbance to wildlife as much as possible. All harvesting of crops will be done before September 1, the opening of upland bird season.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The proposed action is simply the most cost-effective approach to getting farming done for wildlife on a SP/WMA where FWP does not have the staff, expertise, or equipment to do so. Any adverse impacts are an unavoidable component in the use of agricultural practices to manage wildlife habitat at North Shore SP/WMA.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public involvement:

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

- Two public notices in each of these newspapers: Flathead Beacon, Bigfork Eagle, and Daily Inter Lake.
- One statewide press release.
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web site: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

Notification of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties that commented on the proposal for the purchase of the North Shore SP/WMA to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope, having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

2. Duration of comment period:

The public comment period will extend for 14 days, from June 28 through July 12, 2012. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. on July 12, 2012, and can be mailed to the address below or e-mailed:

John Vore, Kalispell Area Wildlife Biologist
490 N Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 751-4584
jvore@mt.gov

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. **Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? No**

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

No significant impacts are expected.

2. **Name, title, address, and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**

John Vore, Kalispell Area Wildlife Biologist
490 N Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
(406) 751-4584
jvore@mt.gov

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

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Wildlife Bureau, Parks Division