

**Draft
Environmental Assessment**

**Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area
Addition**

September 21, 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:** Purchase of 31 acres for addition to the Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area for \$28,000.
2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:** Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) has the authority under state law (§ 87-1-201, Montana Code Annotated (MCA) to protect, enhance, and regulate the use of Montana's fish and wildlife resources for public benefit now and in the future, and to acquire land for this purpose (§ 87-1-209, MCA). In 1987, the Montana Legislature passed HB526 which earmarked hunting license revenues to secure wildlife habitat through lease, conservation easement, or fee-title acquisition (§ 87-1-241 and 242, MCA). The Habitat Montana Program, developed as a result of this legislation, provides direction for all FWP's wildlife habitat acquisition programs.
3. **Anticipated Schedule:** Purchase is proposed to be completed by December 31, 2012.
4. **Location affected by proposed action (see Appendix A for maps of area):** The property is located in the upper Yellowstone Valley in Park County, in Section 34, T6S, R7E.
5. **Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:**

<u>Acres</u>	<u>Acres</u>	
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain
Residential	___0	
Industrial	___0	(e) Productive:
(b) Open Space/	___0	Irrigated cropland
Woodlands/Recreation		Dry cropland
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	___0	Forestry
Areas		Rangeland
		Other
		___0

6. Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.

No permits required.

7. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

FWP proposes to purchase 31 acres as an addition to the 4,800 acre Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The parcel is being offered for sale to FWP by the non-profit Cinnabar Foundation which acquired this land in 2001 as part of a conservation project in the upper Yellowstone Valley. The cost of the property to FWP will be \$28,000 (approximately \$900/acre). This represents a below market price being offered to FWP by the Cinnabar Foundation as similar properties in the upper Yellowstone typically command prices in the range of \$5,000 - \$10,000 per acre. Funds for the purchase would be provided through FWP's Habitat Montana Program using hunting license dollars that are dedicated by law for the acquisition of important wildlife habitat.

The parcel is located on a plateau, Hepburn Mesa, above an abrupt rise from the Yellowstone River floodplain. This plateau is heavily used by wintering elk and provides an undeveloped area for elk to use which is important for alleviating wildlife conflicts with livestock producers adjacent to the WMA. With the addition of this parcel, the boundary of the WMA would be extended to the western edge of the plateau.

The parcel would be managed as part of the WMA to meet FWP objectives including providing hunting and recreational opportunities during the portion of the year that the WMA is open (May 15 – Nov 30), and protected wintering wildlife range during December 1 – May 14 when the WMA is closed.

No development or recent agricultural activities have occurred on this land. The land is composed of a mix of intermountain grassland and shrub-grassland which rests at 5,400 feet in elevation. The habitat is intact with few weeds or degraded soils. The parcel has not been open to public hunting or recreation in recent years, and there is no road access.

8. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action: The proposed land acquisition would not occur, and no change would be made to the boundaries of the Dome Mountain WMA. With this alternative, the owners of this parcel would be able to offer the land up for private sale which could result in additional residential development and fragmentation of elk winter range on Hepburn Mesa. The adjacent privately owned parcels to the west at the base of the plateau have been subdivided and developed.

Alternative B: Proposed Action: FWP would purchase (fee title) 31 acres as an addition to the Dome Mountain WMA for the benefit of providing additional winter range habitat for elk and other wildlife species.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

Evaluation of the impacts of the **Proposed Action** 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				
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility?		X				
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				

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 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				

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				
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. <u>For P-R/D-I</u> , will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		n/a				
m. <u>For P-R/D-I</u> , will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		n/a				

There are no water resources associated with the 31 acres.

4. <u>VEGETATION</u>	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
Will the proposed action result in?						
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		X				
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
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				
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		n/a				
g. Other:		X				

5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u>	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
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				
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			
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				

With the addition of this parcel to the WMA, the land will be open to public recreation and hunting during May 15 – Nov 30. This increased opportunity will likely result in harvest of elk, deer, and upland game birds as well as minor disturbance to wildlife due to other recreational activities but would preclude future residential development that would adversely impact wildlife. The WMA is closed to all public activities from December 1 through May 14 in order to avoid disturbance of wintering elk and other wildlife.

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				
b. Exposure of people to serve 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. <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. 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. <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				
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				

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				

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. 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				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				
f. Define projected maintenance costs.*		X				X

For properties in its ownership, FWP makes annual payments to county governments equal to the property tax payments that would be due if the land were in private ownership. For this 31-acre acquisition, FWP will pay Park County approximately \$127 annually. As a result, there will be no change in county revenue upon FWP acquisition of this parcel.

FWP does not anticipate the acquisition of 31 acres would impact the existing maintenance budget for the Dome Mountain WMA. Weed management costs for the additional acres are expected to be minimal.

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. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c.)		n/a				

The proposed acquisition would maintain the open view on the Hepburn Mesa and provide additional acres for seasonal hunting and recreational activities.

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. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		n/a				

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. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		n/a				
g. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , list any federal or state permits required.		n/a				

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The proposed action is acquisition by FWP of a 31 acre parcel of land for addition to the Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA) for a cost of \$28,000. This parcel is currently undeveloped and if acquired will remain undeveloped to be managed for wildlife habitat consistent with the current WMA management objectives. With this environmental assessment, FWP has found no adverse impacts of the proposed action. The no-action alternative could result in adverse impacts to wildlife due to the potential for the sale and development of the parcel within elk wintering range.

PART IV. 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:

- Two public notices in the Livingston Enterprise and Bozeman Chronicle
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

Copies of this environmental assessment will be distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties 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 (30) days following the publication of the legal notice in area newspapers. Written comments will be accepted until October 22, 2012 and can be mailed to the address below (Part V, 2)

PART V. 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.

The proposed action will not have a measureable adverse impact on the local environment; it represents a small addition (31 acres) to an existing and much larger (4,800 acres) habitat conservation area that has proven beneficial for wildlife habitat and agriculture for the past 23 years. This EA is the appropriate level of analysis for the proposed action.

- 2. Person responsible for preparing the EA:**

Karen Loveless
Livingston Area Biologist
1400 South 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718
406-333-4211
kloveless@mt.gov

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

Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks:
Wildlife Division
Lands/Outreach Section

APPENDICES

- A. Area Description and Map

APPENDIX A. AREA DESCRIPTION AND MAP

The Dome Mountain WMA covers approximately 4,800 acres located on the east side of the Upper Yellowstone Valley approximately 14 miles north of Yellowstone National Park and 30 miles south of Livingston, MT (Figure 1). The majority of the area is open bunchgrass rangeland at elevations of 5,200-7,600 feet.

The parcel proposed for acquisition is located on the western boundary of the northern portion of the Dome Mountain WMA, in the southeast quarter of Section 34, T6S, R7E, and encompasses 31 acres. The parcel is located on the western edge of Hepburn Mesa, just above a steep embankment overlooking the Yellowstone River, adjacent to the west boundary of the Dome Mountain WMA (Figure 2).



