Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks

Draft Environmental Assessment

Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area

2-Year Grazing Lease Extension

Draft Environmental Assessment

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to extend the grazing lease for the Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area (WMA) for 2 years until September 15th, 2014.

The WMA is currently in a three-pasture rest-rotation grazing system with a maximum stocking rate of 300 Animal Unit Months (AUMs). Under the proposed lease extension, grazing would continue under these parameters. The grazing rate charged for use of this WMA is the standard Department of Natural Resources (DNRC) base grazing rate. This rate is based on a factor determined by the State Land Board multiplied by the weighted average price per pound of beef in Montana in the previous year. The factor was 8.13 in 2012 and the grazing lease rate was $7.90/AUM. The DNRC grazing rate for 2013 will be $9.94 in 2013. The DNRC grazing rate for 2014 has yet to be determined, but the multiplying factor will increase 6.7% from 8.72 to 9.3.

During the first year of the 2-year lease extension, FWP intends to complete a new management plan for Fresno Reservoir WMA, which will consider prioritize management objectives of the WMA for providing productive wildlife habitat and hunting recreation. This planning effort will consider the role of livestock grazing and the condition of upland, riparian, and wetland habitats, among other WMA management components.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks was granted management authority of this area under the guidelines of a long-term lease agreement (14-06-600-1822A) with the Bureau of Reclamation in 1975. Based on the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MCA 75-1-701) and Montana administrative rules (ARM 12.2.430), an evaluation must be conducted to determine the potential significance of impacts to the human and physical environment of proposed actions. In addition, the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks lease-out policy requires the completion of an environmental assessment (EA) before a decision is made to lease or extend or renew a lease.

3. Name of project:

Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area Grazing Lease 2-year Extension

4. Name, address and phone number of project sponsor (if other than the agency):

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Region 6, 54078 US Hwy 2 West, Glasgow, MT 59230

5. Anticipated Schedule:

Estimated Commencement Date: May 15th, 2013
Estimated Completion Date: September 15th, 2014

6. Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township):

The Fresno Reservoir WMA is located in western Hill County. It is northwest of Fresno Reservoir along the western edge of the Milk River. It is approximately 23 miles northwest of the city of Havre (Appendix A & B). The majority of the vegetation on this site is native mixed-grass prairie consisting predominately of western wheatgrass, blue grama, needle and thread grass, bluebunch wheatgrass, and green needlegrass. There are approximately 700 acres of floodplain and riparian habitat present. The riparian habitats consist largely of Russian olive and willow species and smaller patches of Plains cottonwood. A larger wetland was created on the WMA through the construction of a dike system. The size of the wetland varies depending on annual weather conditions and river flows.

Legal Description

T34N R 12E	Section 2 T34 N, R12 E, Lots1-7, SWNW, SW Section 3 E/2NW, NE, NESE, S/2S/2 Section 4 SESE Section 10 NENW, N/2NE, SENE, NESE Section 11 NW, S/2 EXCEPT NESE; SWNE
T 35N R12E	Section 27 E/2, E/2W/2 Section 34 SESE Section 35 Lots 3,4,5

7. Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

	Acres		Acres
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	380
Residential	0		
Industrial	0	(e) Productive:	
		Irrigated cropland	0
(b) Open Space/ Woodlands/Recreation	0	Dry cropland	0
		Forestry	0
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	315	Rangeland	1945
		Other	0

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

(a) Permits: NA

(b) Funding: NA

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

Agency Name
Bureau of Reclamation

Type of Responsibility

The Bureau of Reclamation is the owner of this property, which has been leased by Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks through a long-term cooperative agreement. FWP and BOR management responsibilities for this property are dictated by a memorandum of agreement between the two agencies. The BOR maintained rights of access, mineral leasing and development rights. Approval is required from the BOR for any construction activities or use of pesticides. The BOR also maintained authority for approving leases, licenses, permits, and contracts between FWP and third parties.

9. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action:

This proposal would extend the grazing lease on the Fresno Reservoir WMA for another 2 years, until September 15, 2014. The goal of FWP management of this property is to maximize wildlife benefits by enhancing the quality and quantity of the wildlife habitat in this area and to provide recreational opportunities. The species identified as the primary management focus for this area are waterfowl, pheasants, white-tailed deer, and upland nesting birds. Since the origination of this agreement, a dike system has been constructed to increase and enhance the wetland habitat available on the WMA.

Grazing on the property is currently structured as a 3 pasture rest-rotation grazing system that was first implemented on the property in 1992 (Appendix C). From 1976-1992 there was no authorized grazing on the WMA. The original stated purpose of this grazing system was to improve grass and shrub rangeland condition and improve wildlife habitat including upland bird nesting cover and big game forage availability.

The potential benefits of the livestock grazing system implemented on this WMA include periodically prescribed removal of decadent residual grass, increased plant productivity, and increased forage quality. Livestock grazing can also help reduce fuel loads and decrease wildfire risk on the property. The presence of a lessee on the property is a benefit through the maintenance of fences associated with the grazing system and the identification of noxious weed infestations. The lessee has also assisted with wetland water management on the WMA. A rest-rotation grazing system provides the benefit of maintaining a mosaic of vegetation heights and structures. The rested, ungrazed pasture provides areas with increased vegetation height and cover that provide nesting, brood rearing, and security habitat for upland game birds, waterfowl, and other species preferring habitats with taller, denser vegetation. The grazed areas provide benefits of increased incorporation of organic matter and nutrients into the soil, and increased seed germination. Grazed pastures also provide more open areas with decreased vegetation heights preferred by some wildlife species. Extension of this lease would also provide economic benefits to the local community by providing spring and summer grazing for up to 75 cow/calf pairs (300 AUMs). This grazing opportunity would allow an area rancher to maintain their existing livestock operation.

10. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:

Alternative A: No Action

Under the no action alternative the grazing lease would not be extended. There would be no livestock grazing on the Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area for at least the next year. As a result, there would be a short-term loss of 300 AUMs of grazing capacity in the area.

There would be some decreased maintenance costs related to monitoring grazing and maintaining the grazing system fences on this WMA if the grazing lease is not extended, but there would be a loss of revenue generated by the grazing lease.

The absence of grazing would increase residual grass cover. The increased residual grass cover would provide additional nesting cover for waterfowl, upland game birds and grassland birds. However, over time the absence of grazing may reduce the availability, palatability, vigor, and nutrient value of vegetation for ungulates and other herbivores. The absence of grazing could result in an increase in fire fuels and wildfire risk.

Alternative B: Proposed Action -

Under the proposed alternative, the grazing lease would be extended on the property for an additional two years. The property would continue to be grazed under a 3 pasture rest-rotation grazing system with a maximum capacity of 300 AUMs (see Appendix C). The grazing rate for this lease was $7.90/AUM in 2012 and is projected to increase in 2012 and 2013. The income generated by this lease could provide potential funding for habitat improvement or maintenance projects on this or other WMAs.

There would be continued maintenance costs related to monitoring grazing and maintaining grazing system fencing on this WMA if the lease is extended.

Grazing would reduce residual grass cover in the two grazed pastures. The removal of residual cover would likely reduce the amount or quality of nesting cover for some grassland birds and upland nesting game birds in the grazed pastures. However, grazing may increase the quality of forage for ungulates particularly white-tailed deer and mule deer. Grazing could result in a decrease in fire fuels and wildfire risk.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

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

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

1b. Hoof action from livestock grazing can have impacts on soil compaction and erosion under heavier grazing pressure. The current stocking rate on this WMA and the two years of growing season rest each pasture receives in the grazing rotation has in the past prevented any significant impacts to soil quality. There would likely be some soil compaction in heavy use areas such as around water sources and mineral (salt) blocks. These areas of heavy use are relatively small in acreage and would have only minor overall impacts on soils. The grazing rotation should allow the vegetation and soil in these heavy use areas to recover from these temporary impacts.

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 regs? (Also see 2a.)		N/A				
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Air Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

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?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?			X			3h
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.)		NA				
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.)		NA				
n. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

The presence of livestock would increase the potential for introduction of bacteria into nearby water sources. This WMA is located along the Milk River. The majority of land along the Milk River above and below Fresno Reservoir is currently agricultural land used for livestock production. Relative to the watershed, this WMA is small in size and has a moderate stocking rate (300 AUM). Livestock grazing on this WMA is limited to more disperse spring/summer grazing. Livestock are not grazed on the WMA during the fall/winter season when feeding operations are likely to result in increased livestock densities. Therefore, the overall impact on water quality due to grazing is projected to be minor.

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				
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			4e
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		N/A				
g. Other:		N/A				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Vegetation (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

4a. Grazing can impact the diversity, productivity, abundance, and standing cover of plant species primarily grasses on the WMA. Livestock grazing can have both positive and negative impacts on vegetation productivity and diversity depending on how it is managed (e.g. timing, duration and intensity of grazing). The native grasslands in this area are adapted to periodic grazing. The moderate stocking rate and the grazing rotation, which includes seasonal deferment and yearlong rest, supports the overall health of native vegetation on the WMA.

4e. Livestock grazing does have the potential to increase the spread of seeds from noxious weeds. The Fresno Reservoir WMA generally has had very few noxious weed infestations. The most likely source for the spread or establishment of noxious weeds is from seed sources along the Milk River upstream of the WMA. Currently, the cattle grazed on this WMA spend the winter and fall on land immediately adjacent to the WMA and are unlikely to introduce any new weed species. Livestock may increase the spread of noxious weeds already present on the WMA (primarily thistle) to other parts of the WMA or adjacent lands. There may be a higher potential of for noxious weed transport onto the WMA from wildlife than from cattle. Any potential establishment or spread of noxious weeds can be mitigated by monitoring of weeds by the lessee and FWP staff followed by chemical and/or biologically treatment. The presence of a lessee on the WMA may help in earlier identification and more effective control of noxious weeds.

** 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			5c
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					5f
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.)		NA				
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.)		NA				
j. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Fish and Wildlife:

5bc. Livestock grazing can have impacts on habitat productivity for both game and nongame fish and wildlife species. Light -to-moderate grazing pressure that is rotated seasonally will reduce upland nesting cover but may also keep perennial grasses and forbs in a more productive state through time, The effects of grazing will vary by wildlife species with some species preferring productive grasses that are grazed periodically, such as ungulates, and other species that benefit from more residual cover, such as upland nesting birds. The current rest-rotation grazing system has been in place for the past 21 years. Extension of the current grazing system would maintain current vegetative conditions and therefore no new impacts to wildlife abundance or diversity are expected.

5f. There are no known US Fish and Wildlife Service Threatened or Endangered (T &E) species or crucial habitats for species known to be present on this property. Based on the location of this property and the vegetation types present, there may be Sprague's pipit (a candidate T&E species) present on this site, but none have been observed. There are several Species of Concern or Potential Species of Concern known to occur in this area including- Brewer's sparrow, Chestnut collared longspur, Long-billed curlew, American bittern, Great blue heron, Baird's sparrow, McCown's longspur, and Black-tailed prairie dogs. The impacts of grazing on these species can vary. Some of these species have been shown to benefit from moderate to high intensity grazing including the McCown's Longspur, Long-billed curlew, Chestnut collared longspur, and Black-tailed prairie dog. The duration and intensity of grazing is a key factor determining the impacts grazing can have on these species. The grazing rotation will provide a mosaic of grazed and ungrazed pastures and would provide habitat both for species requiring taller, denser vegetative structure and species requiring less standing cover and increased visibility.

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				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Noise/Electrical Effects (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

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 (positive)			7a
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				
e. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Use (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

7a. The extension of the grazing lease would extend the positive impact realized since 1992 to the productivity and profitability of land use in this area. The property is currently grazed by approximately 300 AUMs of cattle during the spring an summer.

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)		NA				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Risk/Health Hazards (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

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				
f. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Community Impact (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

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						10e
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.						10f
g. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Public Services/Taxes/Utilities (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

10e. The revenue generated by this grazing lease was $2,370.00 for the 2012 grazing year. Due to projected increased in the DNRC grazing rate it is projected that this lease would likely generate $2,982.00 of revenue in 2013 and $3,180.00 in 2014 based on current market conditions.

10f. The primary maintenance costs associated with this grazing lease would be 1) costs related to monitoring and administrating the grazing lease 2) maintenance of grazing system fencing. Some of the fence maintenance is currently performed by the lessee and these fencing costs would increase if the lease was not extended. Weed control costs should be similar regardless if the lease is extended.

Estimated Maintenance Costs:

Boundary fence maintenance: $300/year
Grazing Administration: $150/year

** 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				
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.)		NA				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Aesthetics/Recreation (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

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.)		NA				
e. Other:		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Cultural/Historical Resources (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE 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					13e
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		NA				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		NA				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Significance Criteria (attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

13e. There have been concerns raised in the past on other wildlife management areas regarding the impacts and costs of livestock grazing and its use as a vegetation and wildlife management tool. It is unexpected that there would be substantial local controversy raised by extension of this lease.

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

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

A rest-rotation grazing system has been in place on the Fresno Reservoir WMA for the past 21 years and extension of this grazing lease for another two years under the current system would not result in any foreseeable significant impacts to the vegetation or wildlife on the WMA, nor would it have any foreseeable significant individual or cumulative impacts on the physical or human environment. There were potential minor impacts to the soil, vegetation, and wildlife identified. The impacts from continuing grazing on this WMA on the vegetation and wildlife would vary by species.

The rest rotation grazing system present on this WMA would provide a mosaic of vegetation conditions and heights. Livestock grazing will help remove decadent vegetation, which can improve forage quality and quantity for mule deer and white-tailed deer. Other species that prefer more open sites with shorter vegetation will also benefit. The grazing rotation would include an ungrazed pasture, providing taller residual vegetation for the benefit of other wildlife species, including cover for upland nesting birds. Grazing would reduce fire fuel loads and may reduce wildfire potential. The extension of this lease would also provide minor benefits to the local community and economy.

Finally, the lease extension will provide a window of time for FWP to develop a management plan for Fresno WMA that will include an evaluation of the use of livestock grazing and other management options.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. **Describe the level of public involvement for this project if any, and, given the complexity and the seriousness of the environmental issues associated with the proposed action, is the level of public involvement appropriate under the circumstances?**

Public notification of this EA and opportunity to comment will be provided through the following means.

- A statewide press release
- Two public notices in each of these papers: Great Falls Tribune and Havre Daily News
- Direct mailing to adjacent landowners and interested parties
- Public notice and posting of the EA on the FWP web page, http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices
- There will be an informational meeting and public hearing on this proposal in Havre at 7pm in the Hill County Electric Hospitality Room on March 7th

Copies of the EA will be available for public review at the Region 6 Headquarters in Glasgow and at the FWP area office in Havre.

2. Duration of comment period, if any.

The public comment period will extend for 30 days starting February 15th. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 pm on March 16th and can be mailed to the address below

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
ATTN: Fresno Reservoir WMA Grazing Lease Extension
2165 Hwy 2 East
Havre, MT 59501

Or comments can be emailed to

shemmer@mt.gov

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?

Based on the above assessment, which has not identified any significant impacts from the proposed action pursuant to ARM 12.2.431, an EIS is not required and an EA is the appropriate level of review. The result of the successful completion of the proposed action would have no significant negative individual or cumulative impacts on the physical or human environment.

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

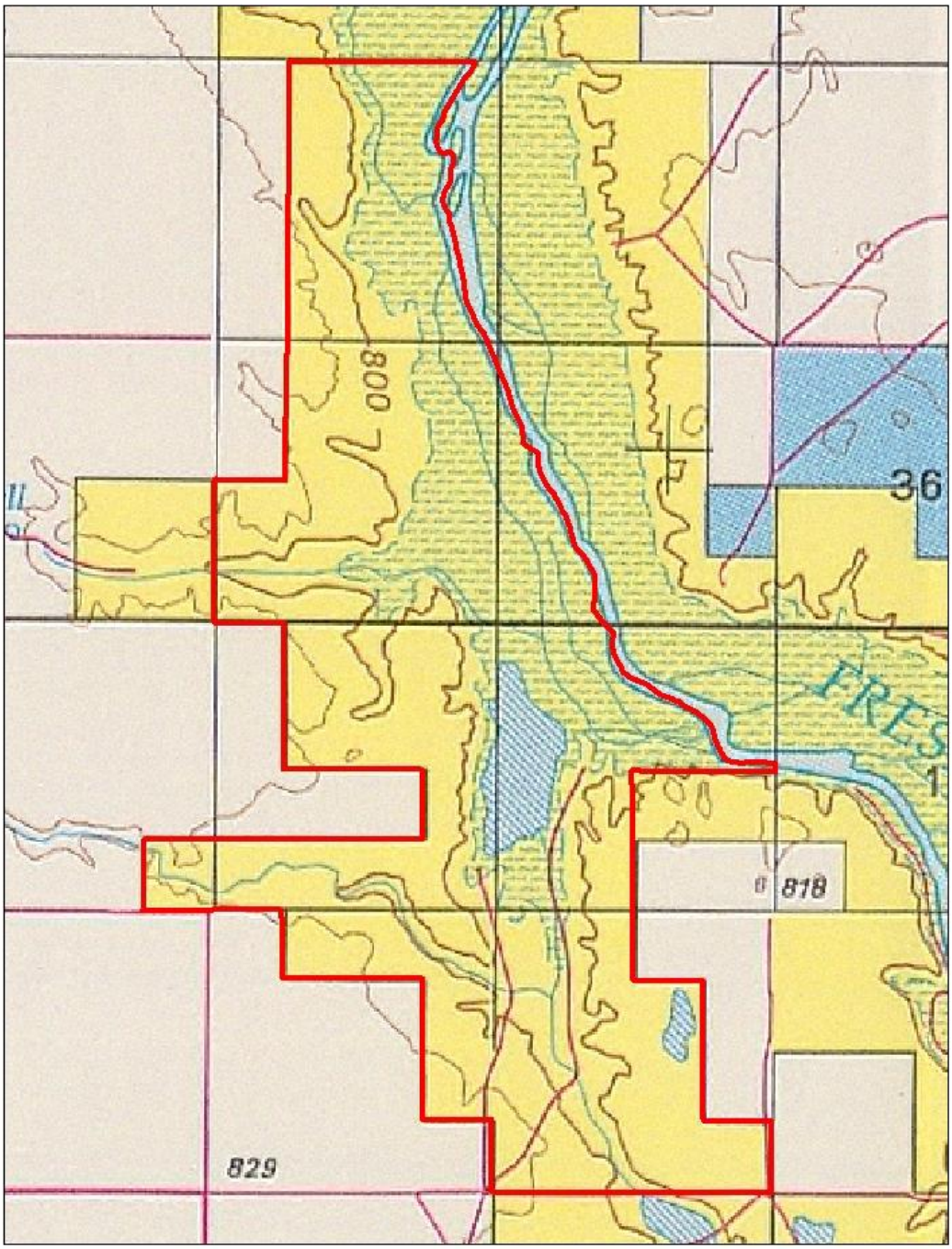
Scott Hemmer
Havre Area Wildlife Biologist
2165 Hwy 2 East
Havre, MT 59501
406-265-6177 x224
shemmer@mt.gov

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

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Wildlife Division
Lands Unit
US Bureau of Reclamation

Appendix A

Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area



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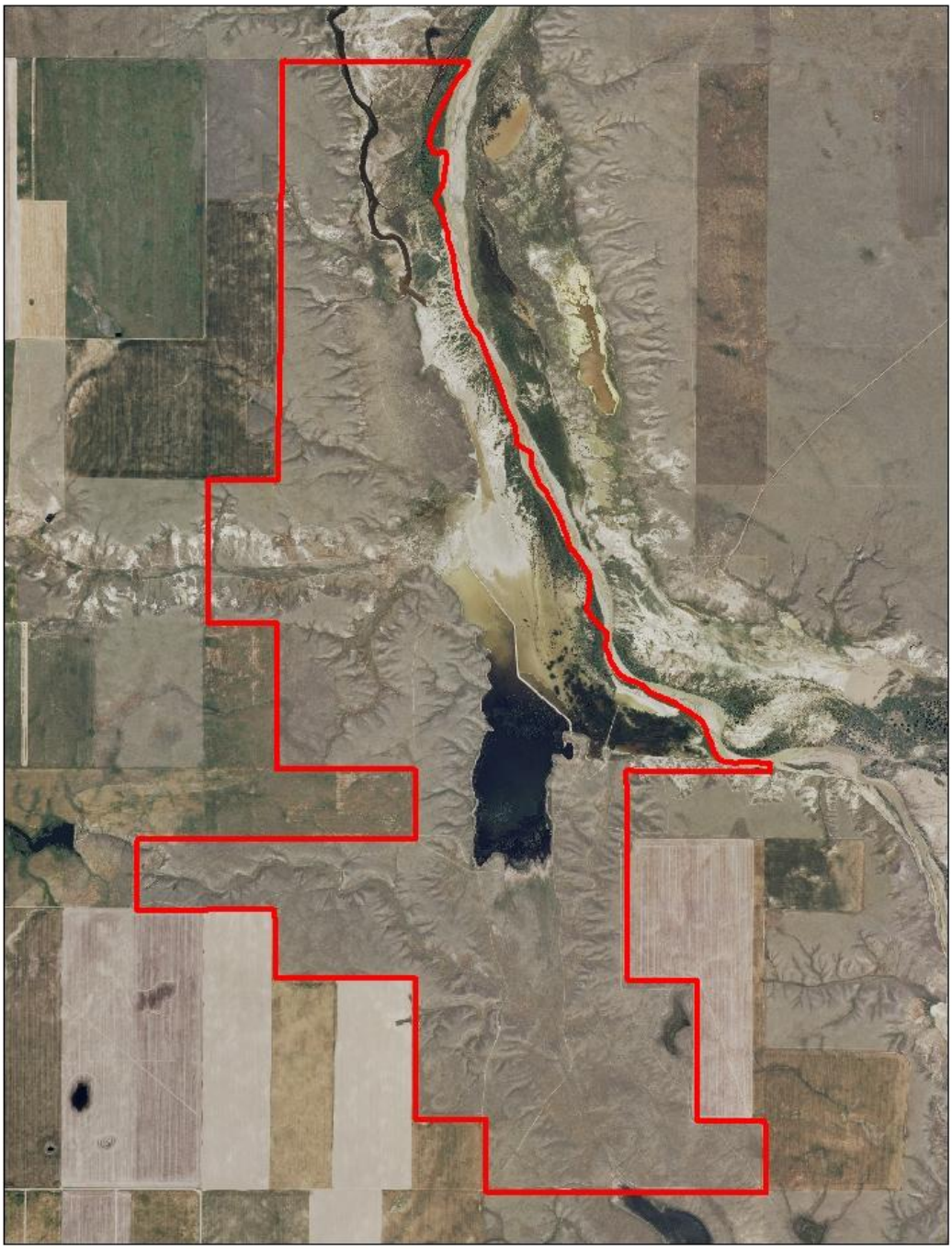
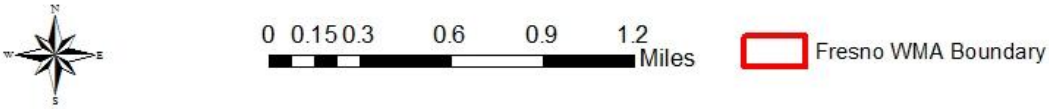
Fresno WMA Boundary

Appendix B

Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area

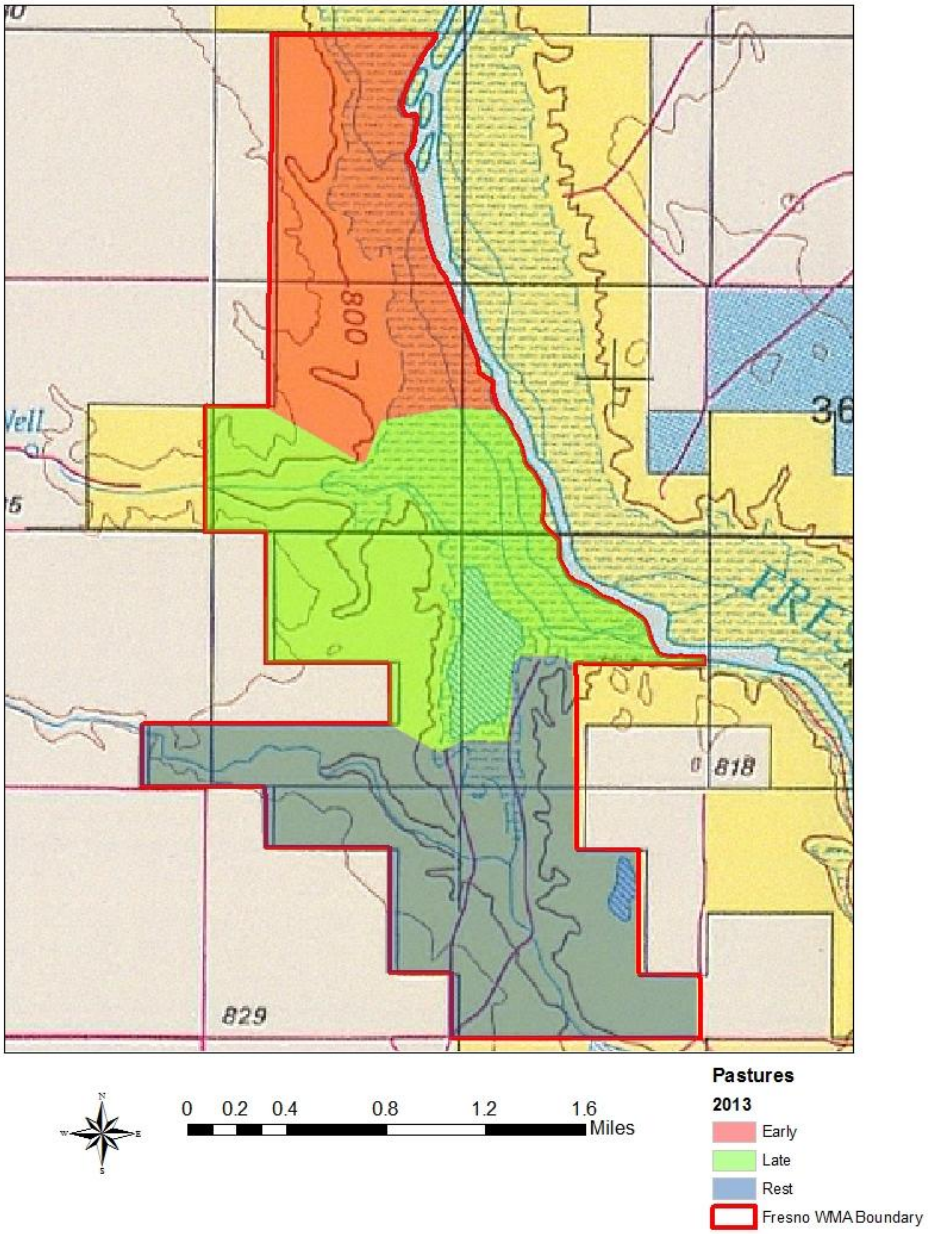




Appendix C

The rest-rotation grazing system on the Fresno Reservoir WMA consists of 3 pastures. In this system, livestock are allowed into the early graze pasture on May 15th. Livestock remain in this pasture until seed-ripe. After seed-ripe livestock are moved into the late graze pasture. Livestock can remain in this pasture until September 15th at which point they are removed from the WMA. The third pasture is not grazed at all during this year. The next year the previous year's rest pasture will be grazed early, the previous year's early graze pasture will become the late graze pasture, and the previous year's late graze pasture will be rested. Currently the WMA is grazed by a maximum of 75 cow/calf pairs from May 15th to September 15th for a total of 300 Animal Unit Months (AUMs)

Fresno Reservoir Rest-Rotation Grazing Pastures 2013



Fresno Reservoir Rest-Rotation Grazing Pastures 2014