Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

4600 Giant Springs Road, Great Falls, MT 59405

March 21, 2013

Dear Interested Party:

This letter is to notify you that I have made a decision regarding Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks implementation of a grazing lease renewal on the Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area (BLWMA). My decision is to move forward with the proposed action. The lease will allow the removal of current vegetation by grazing as a management tool to enhance the subsequent availability and palatability of fall and spring forage on the BLWMA as described in the Environmental Assessment and proposed grazing plan.

No modifications were made in the documents you received/reviewed after the public review period. Please consider your previous copy of the Environmental Assessment and the proposed grazing plan along with the stipulations of this Decision Notice as final.

The single comment received regarding the BLWMA Proposal was summarized in the enclosed Decision Notice. No changes have been made to the draft Environmental Analysis after consideration of public input. It is my recommendation to move forward with the proposed grazing system lease renewal on the BLWAM.

Thank you for your interest and involvement.

Sincerely,

Gary Bertellotti
MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 4 - Regional Supervisor
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405
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DECISION NOTICE

BLACKLEAF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA GRAZING ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 4, Great Falls
March 21, 2013

Proposal

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) proposes to renew a grazing lease on the Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area (BLWMA) with the Pollock Ranch for a 7-year term to begin June 1, 2013 through August 15, 2019 which would allow the continuation of a rest-rotation grazing system on the BL WMA in place since 2002. The proposed lease would encompass 10,397 acres, deeded and leased.

Public Comment

MFWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess significant potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. In compliance with MEPA, an Environmental Assessment (EA) was completed for the proposed project by MFWP and released for public comment on February 20, 2013.

Public comments on the proposed project were taken for more than 21 days ending March 13, 2013. The EA was available at the FWP Regional Office in Great Falls; notices were printed in the Great Falls Tribune, other local newspapers and the EA was posted on the FWP webpage: http://www.fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices.

Summary of Public Comments

No pertinent issues were raised during the comment period of the EA process. A single comment was received on the proposal. The comment was in support of the Proposed Action as written in the EA. The comment from the Teton County Commission recognized grazing as a valid use of the BLWMA and is consistent with good stewardship of the resource.

Decision

Based on public comments and internal review, the Draft EA will be adopted as the Final EA. This Decision Notice and the Final EA will serve as the final documents pertaining to this action.

MFWP recognizes that there will be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that an Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis and that an Environmental Impact Statement is

not required. Given the results of MFWP's analysis coupled with the nature of the public comment, acceptance of this grazing proposal on the BLWMA is warranted.

In consideration of these facts, it is my recommendation that the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission proceed with the grazing proposal of the BLWMA as described in the proposed action.

Signed

Gary Bertellotti
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Region-4 Regional Supervisor
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Wildlife Management Area Grazing Management Fact Sheet
Region: 4

1. **Wildlife Management Area:** Blackleaf WMA in Teton County

2. **Brief Overview of the Lease Arrangement:** a 7 year lease renewal; part of existing 4-pasture grazing rotation system has been in place since 2002: same pastures and same lessee

3. **FWP Administered Acreage (acres):** approximately 25% of the WMA will be grazed annually of the 10,397 acre WMA (deeded and leased)

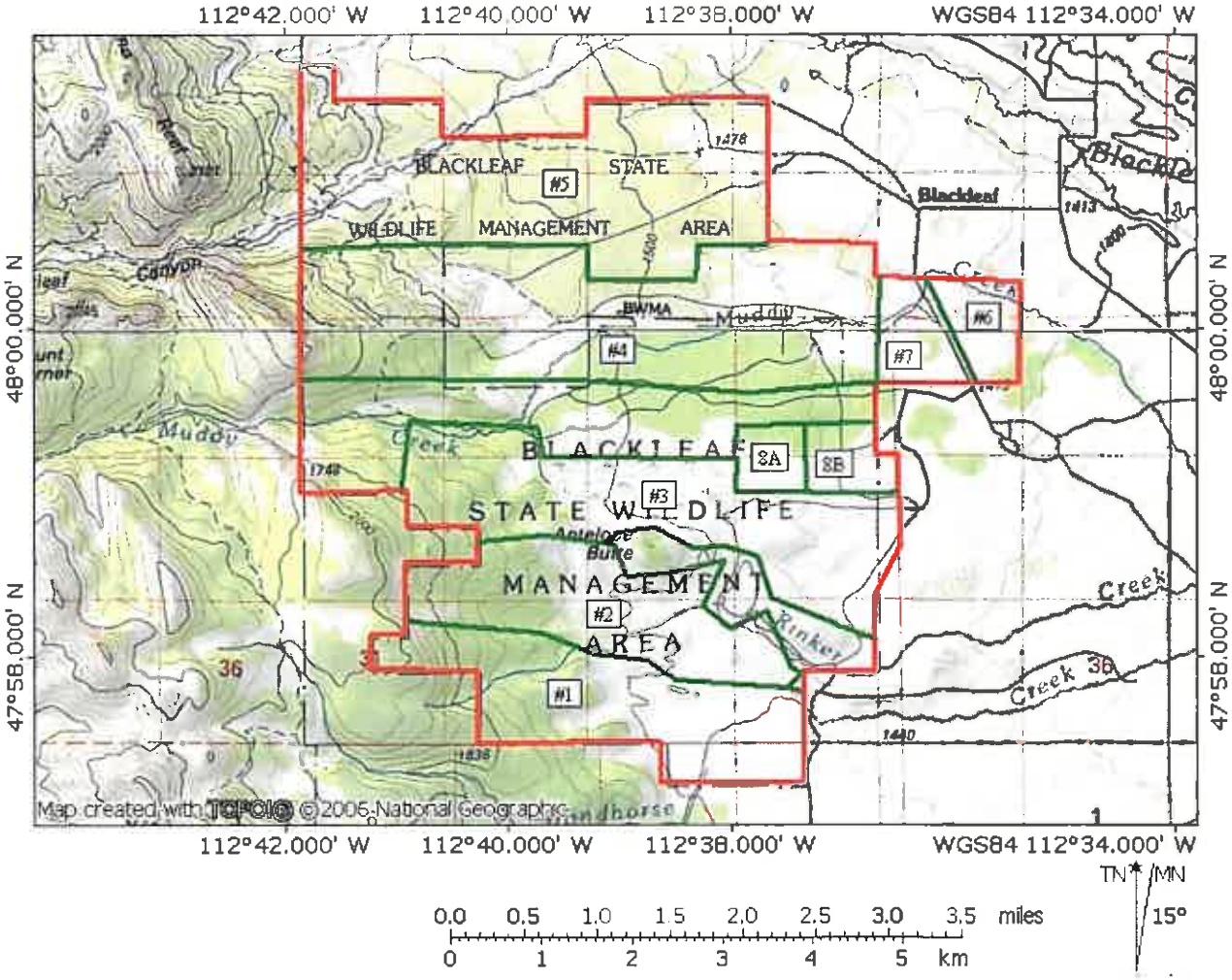
4. **Private Land Acreage involved, if part of a larger grazing system (acres):** 4-pasture grazing system is wholly contained within the WMA.

5. **Wildlife habitat benefit derived from this lease:** Remove residual vegetation to enhance the availability, palatability and long term health of forage according to the 4-year rotational schedule. Manipulate current vegetation with livestock grazing to encourage more elk, mule deer and antelope use of the BLWMA during the spring and fall and yet retain adequate winter forage. Periodic livestock grazing enhances these seasonal habitats and forage quality for elk and mule deer, which is the primary objective of the current BLWMA management plan

6. **Public Hunting Access to private lands identified in the grazing lease, if any**: Pollock Ranch (lessee) agrees to allow free public hunting access to their property (approximately 7,680 acres) as a condition of the grazing lease (terms and map included in lease document)

7. **AUMs and Fees with explanation for how derived:** 500 to 1500 (max) AUM's @ $19.40 per AUM rate. Rate = 2012 average MT private land AUM grazing rate

Grazing Plan – Blackleaf WMA

Pasture

Year	1	2	3	4	5a	5b	6	7	8a	8b
2013				graze			graze		graze	
2014		*graze*			*graze*					
2015			*graze*			*graze*				
2016	*graze*							*graze*		graze
2017				*graze*			*graze*		graze	
2018		*graze*			*graze*					
2019			*graze*			*graze*