Draft Environmental Assessment

Vandalia Wildlife Management Area
3 Year Grazing Lease Extension

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

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

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of proposed state action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) proposes to renew the grazing lease for the Vandalia Wildlife Management Area (WMA) for 3 years, until September 15, 2016.

The 310 acre WMA is currently divided into two pastures, with a total maximum stocking rate of 239 AUMs, which are utilized as part of a three-pasture rest-rotation system. The third pasture comes in the form of a neighboring 900 acre private pasture. The current grazing rate charged for use of this WMA is the low (DNRC) grazing rate, as the lessee provides services and maintenance to the WMA.

During this proposed 3-year lease extension, MFWP intends to complete a new management plan for Vandalia WMA, which will provide prioritized management objectives of the WMA for providing productive wildlife habitat and hunting recreation. This 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 authority for management of this area under the guidelines of a 30 year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (4-A6-60-04530) with the Bureau of Reclamation and the Glasgow Irrigation District, for the express purpose of fulfilling requirements agreed to in the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (FWCA). 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:

Vandalia Wildlife Management Area: 3 Year Grazing Lease 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 (406) 228-3700.

5. Anticipated Schedule:
Estimated Commencement Date: May 15, 2014
Estimated Completion Date: September 15, 2016

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

The Vandalia WMA is located in Valley County. It is southeast of Hinsdale, MT approximately 2.5 miles, and borders the south side of the Milk River (Appendix A and B). With a total of 310 acres, the vegetation on the site consists of sagebrush grasslands, cottonwood and green ash galleries, along with wetland/oxbow/riparian complexes.

Legal Description

T 30N R 36E

a. S ½ NW ¼ N ¼, Section 10
b. NE ¼ NE ¼, Section 10
c. N ½ NW ¼, Section 11
d. SE ¼ NW ¼, Section 11
e. NE ¼, Section 11
f. S ½ NW ¼, Section 12
g. W ½ NE ¼, Section 12

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

	Acres		Acres
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	0
Residential	0		
Industrial	0	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	0
(b) Open Space/	50	Dry cropland	0
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	0
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	50	Rangeland	210
Areas		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	Type of Responsibility
Bureau of Reclamation	

Type of Responsibility

This property is administered by Bureau of Reclamation. Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks is responsible for managing the property. FWP and BOR management responsibilities for this property are dictated by a Memorandum of Agreement between the two agencies and are guided by the FWCA.

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

The goal of FWP management of Vandalia WMA is to provide 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, mule deer and upland-nesting birds.

This proposal would extend the grazing lease on the Vandalia WMA for a period of 3 years, until September 15, 2016. Grazing on the property is currently structured as a 3 pasture rest-rotation grazing system that is coordinated with neighboring private land. The Vandalia WMA is approximately 310 acres in size, and is divided into two separate pastures for grazing, one of which contains a 30 acre private in-holding (see Appendix B and C), which is also incorporated into the system by the private landowner, the current lessee. The third pasture in the system, which is also owned by the current lessee, consists of 900 acres of private native rangeland that is directly adjacent to the WMA (see Appendix C). This rest-rotation system was first implemented on the property in 1994 and has continued since that time (Appendix C). The original stated purpose of this grazing system was to provide more diverse and productive rangeland through improved vegetation and soil conditions, resulting in habitat improvement for upland bird populations and other wildlife. Under the proposed action, FWP intends to develop a management plan for Vandalia WMA during the 3-year lease renewal period, which would include an evaluation of the use of livestock grazing and other land management options.

The potential benefits of the livestock grazing system implemented on this WMA include periodically prescribed removal of decadent residual grass, with maintained or improved plant productivity and 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 also through the identification of noxious weed infestations. This proposed lease renewal would also continue to incorporate 30 acres of private in-holdings and 900 acres of adjacent private property, all of which would receive the benefits of a rest-rotation grazing system. The grazing system is intended to provide a mosaic of vegetation heights and structures. The rested and deferred pastures provide areas with increased vegetation height that supports nesting, brood rearing, and security cover for upland game birds, waterfowl, and other species. The grazed areas provide potential benefits of increased incorporation of organic matter and nutrients into the soil, and improved seed germination. Grazed pastures provide more open areas with reduced vegetation height, preferred by some wildlife species,

including enhanced spring green-up of grasses for foraging deer. Extension of this lease would also provide economic benefits to the local community by providing late spring and summer grazing for up to 239 AUMs. This grazing opportunity has also helped maintain good working relationships between area ranchers and MFWP.

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 grazing on the Vandalia WMA. The 900 acre private pasture located directly adjacent to the WMA would no longer be managed as part of a 3 pasture rest rotation grazing system. To manage against trespass livestock, FWP would need to construct 0.75 miles of fence to separate the private in-holding from the rest of the WMA.

In the absence of a lease there would be reduced costs associated with monitoring the grazing system. However, there would be increased costs related to fence maintenance on the WMA, as these responsibilities have in the past been placed on the lessee.

The absence of grazing would increase residual grass cover on the WMA, which would for a time provide additional nesting cover for waterfowl, upland game birds and some species of grassland birds. Without periodic grazing disturbance, grass productivity is expected to decline, which would also affect palatability of vegetation for mule deer and white-tailed deer. 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 three years. The WMA, along with the incorporated 900 acre private parcel, would continue to be grazed under a 3 pasture rest-rotation grazing system with a maximum capacity of 239 AUMs on the WMA itself (see Appendix C). Annual cash rental fee would be the state DNRC rate / AUM. This rate, which is lower than the FWP standard rate, requires the lessee to repair and maintain all fences around both pastures each year of the contract.

There would be continued costs related to monitoring grazing on this WMA if the lease is extended.

Through this proposed lease renewal, the rest rotation grazing system would continue to provide a mosaic of vegetation conditions and heights. Grazing livestock would consume standing vegetation, which can help maintain grass productivity and improve subsequent year's forage quality and quantity for mule deer and white-tailed deer. Other species that prefer more open sites with shorter vegetation would also benefit. Grazing would reduce fire fuel loads and may reduce wildfire potential. The grazing rotation would include an un-grazed pasture, providing taller residual vegetation for the benefit of other wildlife

species, including cover for upland nesting birds. The extension of this lease would also provide minor benefits to the local community and economy.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

3. 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 heavy grazing pressure. There would likely be some soil compaction in heavier 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 current stocking rate on this WMA and the growing season rest each pasture receives two out of three years in the grazing rotation allows vegetation and soils to recover from temporary impacts, including these heavy use areas.

* 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.

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):

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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				
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				
n. Other:		x				

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

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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		Yes	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 most likely source for the spread or establishment of noxious weeds is from seed sources along the Milk River. Currently, the cattle grazed on this WMA spend the winter and fall on other 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 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 biological treatment. The presence of a lessee on the WMA may help in earlier identification and more effective control of noxious weeds.

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** 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.)		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				
j. Other:		x				

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

5bc. This rest-rotation grazing system has been in place since 1994. Extension of this lease would continue to maintain vegetation conditions as they have been managed in recent years and therefore no new impacts to wildlife abundance or diversity are expected. Moderate grazing pressure that is rotated seasonally (Treatments A, B) would continue to reduce upland nesting cover but may also keep perennial grasses and forbs in a more productive state through time. The grazing rotation would include an un-grazed pasture (Treatment C), providing taller residual vegetation for the benefit of other wildlife species, including cover for upland nesting birds. During the three year grazing rotation, the pastures would receive two years of growing season rest, allowing for fewer impacts to seed production of forbs and grasses, while providing cover for birds and forage for deer. The effects of the proposed grazing system would vary by wildlife species with some species preferring grasses that are grazed periodically, such as ungulates, and other species that benefit from more residual cover, such as upland nesting birds.

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. There are several Species of Concern or Potential Species of Concern known to occur in this area including- the American White Pelican, Bobolink, Baird's Sparrow, Chestnut Collared Longspur, Great Blue Heron, Long Billed Curlew, Short Eared Owl, Eastern Bluebird and the Ovenbird.

The impacts of grazing on these species can vary, but are generally minor. Some of these species have been shown to benefit from moderate to high intensity grazing including the Long-billed curlew, Bobolink, and Chestnut collared longspur. The seasonal rotation and intensity of grazing are key factors determining the impacts grazing can have on these species. The grazing rotation will provide a mosaic of grazed and un-grazed pastures and would provide

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habitat both for species requiring taller, denser vegetative structure and species requiring less standing cover and increased visibility.

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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 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				
e. Other:		x				

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

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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			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 proposed action would continue to extend for 3 years the arrangement for a 3 pasture rest rotation grazing system that has been in place on the Vandalia WMA and on 930 acres of neighboring private land since 1994. This amounts to approximately 239 AUMs of cattle grazing in a prescribed grazing rotation on the WMA during the spring and summer.

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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				
e. Other:		x				

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

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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):

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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 $1,083.46 for the 2013 grazing year. The projected revenue that this lease would generate would be based on the most current DNRC grazing rate and actual AUM use of the WMA.

10f. The primary maintenance costs associated with this grazing lease would be 1) costs related to monitoring and administrating the grazing lease and 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.

** 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				

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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				
e. Other:		x				

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

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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				
e. Other:		x				

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

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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.)		n/a				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		n/a				

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 habitat management tool.

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

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

A rest-rotation grazing system has been in place on the Vandalia WMA since 1994 and extension of this grazing lease for another three 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. The EA does identify potential minor impacts to the soil, vegetation, and wildlife. The minor impacts to wildlife and vegetation from continuing grazing on this WMA would vary by species.

The rest rotation grazing system would continue to provide a mosaic of vegetation conditions and heights on the WMA and adjacent private land. Livestock grazing would help remove older herbaceous vegetation, which would maintain forage quality and quantity for mule deer and white-tailed deer. Other species that prefer more open sites with shorter vegetation could also benefit.

The grazing rotation would continue to include an un-grazed 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 could reduce wildfire potential. The extension of this lease could also continue to provide minor benefits to the local community and economy.

The proposed lease extension would provide a window of time for MFWP to develop a management plan for Vandalia WMA that would 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?

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

- Two public notices in each of these papers: Glasgow Courier, Phillips County News
- One statewide press release;
- 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, if any.

The public comment period will extend for (21) twenty-one days, starting Tuesday, March 11; written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., March 31, 2014 and can be mailed to the address below:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
ATTN: Vandalia WMA Grazing Lease 3 Year Extension
54078 Hwy 2 West
Glasgow, MT 59230

Or comments can be emailed to:

dhenry@mt.gov

PART V. EA PREPARATION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)?
If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

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:

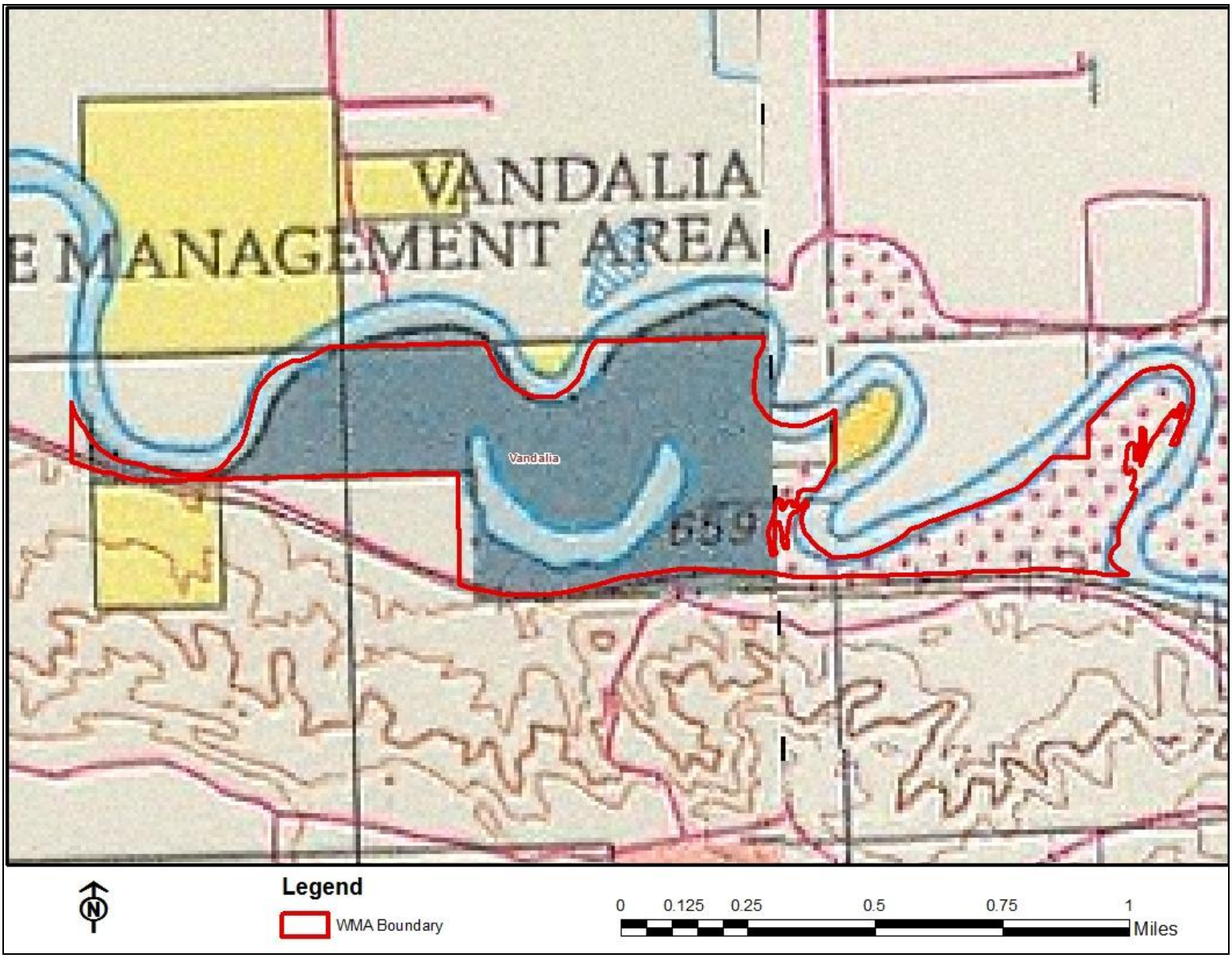
Drew Henry
Glasgow Area Wildlife Biologist
54078 Hwy 2 West
Glasgow, MT 59230
406-228-3709
dhenry@mt.gov

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

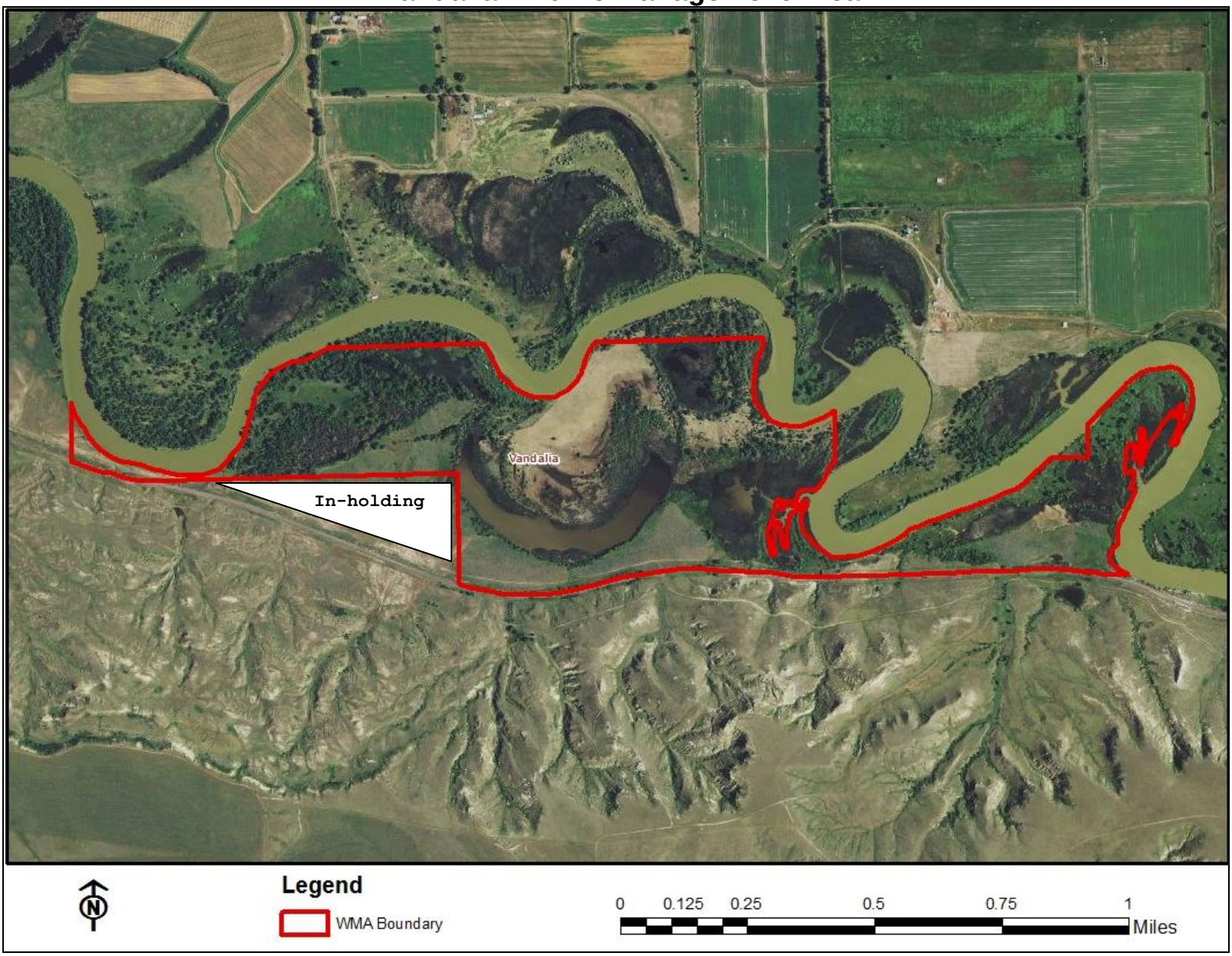
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

US Bureau of Reclamation

APPENDIX A
Vandalia Wildlife Management Area

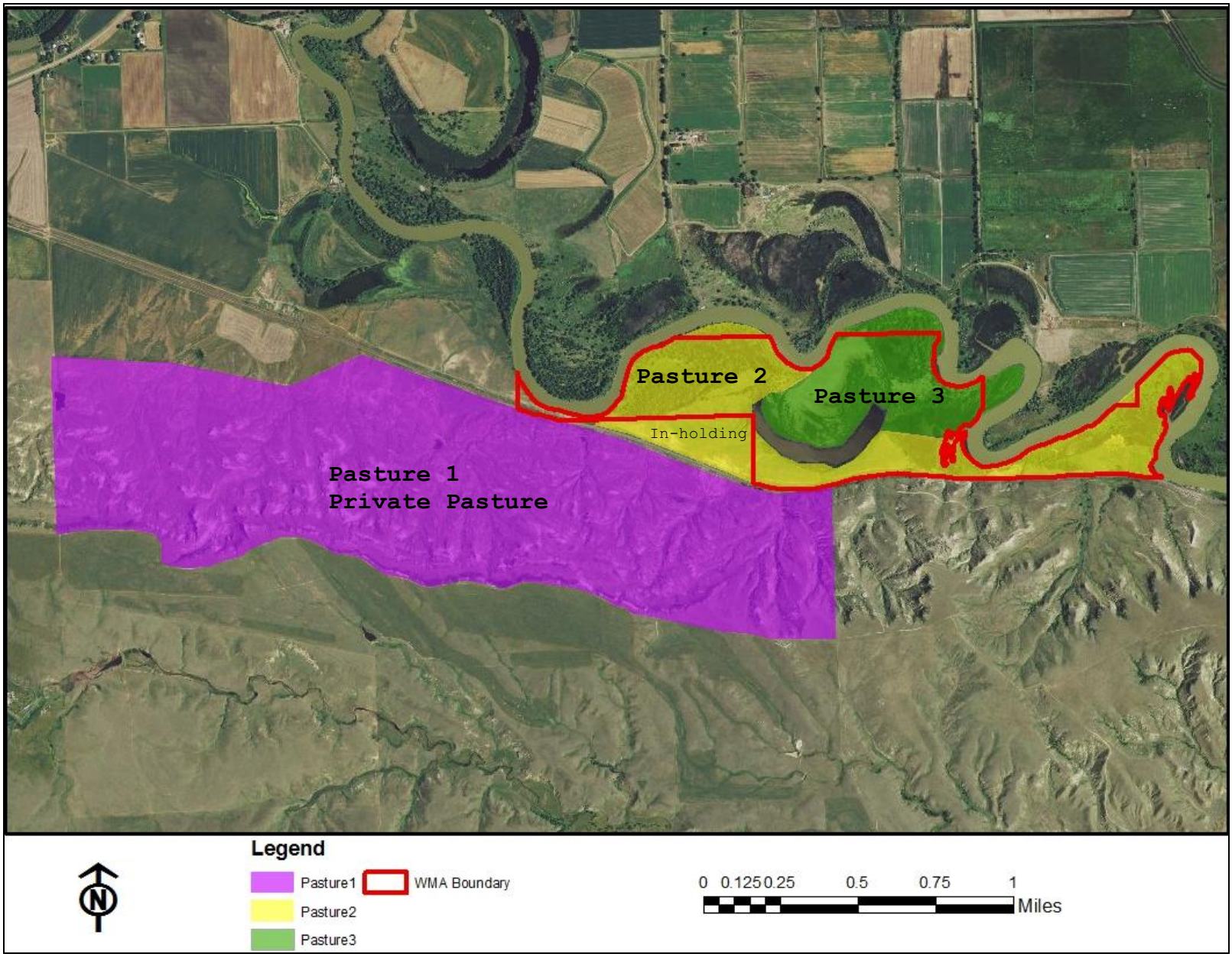


Appendix B
Vandalia Wildlife Management Area



Appendix C
Vandalia WMA Rest-Rotation Grazing Treatments and Pastures

The rest rotation grazing system on the Vandalia WMA consists of three pastures, two of which are located on the WMA and one of which is located on adjacent private property. In this grazing system, as shown in table 1 below, livestock are allowed into the early graze pasture on May 15th and livestock can remain in this pasture until seed-ripe or approximately July 15th (Treatment A). After seed-ripe, the livestock are moved into the late graze pasture and livestock can remain in this pasture until September 15th at which point they are removed from the grazing system (Treatment B). The third pasture is not grazed at all during this year (Treatment C). The next year the previous year's rest pasture is grazed early, the previous year's early graze pasture becomes the late graze pasture, and the previous year's late graze pasture is rested.

	Pasture 1	Pasture 2	Pasture 3
Year	Treatment Type		
2014	C (rest)	A (early)	B (late)
2015	A (early)	B (late)	C (rest)
2016	B (late)	C (rest)	A (early)

Appendix C- continued
Vandalia WMA Rest-Rotation Grazing Treatments and Pastures