Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks

Draft Environmental Assessment

Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area

Grazing Lease 2015-2020

Draft Environmental Assessment

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to continue the grazing lease for the Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area (WMA) for 6 years until December 31, 2020.

Since 1992, the WMA has been grazed by livestock utilizing a three-pasture rest-rotation grazing system. Under this system, the WMA was grazed by 75 cow/calf pairs grazing for 4 months annually, with a maximum of 300 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) allowed each year.

Under the proposed grazing lease, FWP proposes to modify the grazing system by expanding the size of the system. The expanded grazing system would include neighboring adjacent private and leased lands where livestock would be managed through rotational grazing that would include scheduled seasonal grazing deferment and season-long grazing rest.

The proposed expansion would decrease the amount of time on average that WMA pastures are grazed in a given year, and would increase the number of years when the WMA pastures receive year-long rest by an average of 33%. Grazing on the WMA could occur between May 15th and September 27th depending on the grazing schedule. While the total number of AUMs on the WMA and adjacent lands would be 580 AUMs (Appendix C), the average number of AUMs utilizing WMA pastures would decrease from 300 AUMs to 264 AUMs.

The grazing rate charged for use of this WMA is based on the standard Department of Natural Resources (DNRC) grazing rate. This rate is calculated using 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 grazing lease rate will be $14.41/AUM in 2015. This rate is the “low” FWP rate that the lessee is assigned in return for taking on additional maintenance and management responsibilities on the WMA.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks was granted management authority of this area originally under the guidelines of a long-term lease agreement (14-06-600-1822A) with the Bureau of Reclamation in 1975. A new 20-year lease agreement was enacted in 2013 (13-AG-60-0001). 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 2015-2020

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
406-265-6177

5. Anticipated Schedule:
Estimated Commencement Date: May 15th, 2015
Estimated Completion Date: December 31st, 2020

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 found on the WMA is native mixed-grass prairie consisting predominantly of blue grama, western wheatgrass, needle and thread grass, and green needlegrass. There are approximately 680 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 historically varied depending on annual weather conditions and river flows. Flooding in 2011 changed river patterns and the water levels in this wetland have increased and become more consistent.

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	300	Rangeland	1995
		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 (BOR) 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 maintains rights of access, mineral leasing/development rights, and issuance of outgrants. Coordination with BOR is required prior any construction activities by FWP.

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 6 years, until December 31, 2020. The primary goal of the Fresno WMA is to manage the wetland/riparian and upland habitats for the benefit of wildlife, and to provide public opportunity for outdoor recreation, primarily in the forms of hunting, trapping and bird watching.

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 FWP management of this property, a dike system has been constructed to increase and enhance wetland habitat on the WMA. The uplands surrounding the WMA largely comprise tillage cropland. Remaining mixed grass prairie follows along the Milk River corridor extending from Canada to Fresno Reservoir.

Grazing on the property has been conducted using a 3 pasture rest-rotation grazing system that was first implemented on the property in 1992. From 1976-1992 there was no authorized grazing on the WMA. However, trespass livestock were common throughout this period of time due to ineffective boundary fences. 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 new proposed grazing system would include three additional pastures located on adjacent private and leased property (Appendix C). The WMA would maintain grazing in its current three pastures, but these pastures would receive greater periods of rest than in

the past system and have a lower average stocking rate. The first of the three adjacent pastures added to the grazing system, the East Pasture, is native range and would be grazed in a rest-rotation grazing system. The second of the adjacent pastures, the West Pasture, is non-native range (i.e., former CRP on the lessee's private land) and a deferred grazing system would be implemented on this parcel. The third pasture, The BOR North pasture, is an approximately 875 acre parcel consisting primarily native range that would receive growing season rest and would only be use for grazing in the late fall.

The anticipated benefits of the proposed grazing system on this WMA and adjacent private/leased lands would result primarily from the heterogeneity of grazing treatments and periods of rest provided by the rest-rotation grazing system. Each pasture on the WMA will be rested during the growing season at least 4 of the 6 years (Appendix C). The WMA pastures would also receive periods of consecutive year-long rest under this newly designed system. Rested pastures would provide areas with increased vegetation height and cover that would provide potential nesting, brood rearing, and security habitat for upland game birds, waterfowl, grassland songbirds, and other wildlife species that prefer habitats with taller, dense vegetation. The grazed areas would provide benefits of maintaining forage palatability, incorporation of organic matter and nutrients into the soil, and seed germination (McCarthy 2003). Grazed pastures also provide more open areas with shorter vegetation heights and less litter that are preferred habitats by many species found on the WMA including upland sandpipers, chestnut collared longspurs, horned larks, marbled godwits, and willets (Salo et al 2004). The impact of grazing pressure is largely a result of the intensity and timing of grazing. Rest-rotational grazing systems provide a diverse range of habitat conditions to meet a variety of wildlife species needs (Krausman et al 2009).

Additional benefits of light-to-moderate livestock grazing include periodic removal of senescent residual grass, increased plant productivity, and increased forage palatability (Phillips et al 1999) (Wilms et al 1979). Livestock grazing can also help reduce fuel loads and decrease wildfire risk. The presence of a lessee on the property is a benefit through the maintenance of boundary fences associated with the grazing system and the identification and control of noxious weed infestations.

The proposed grazing system would have a positive impact on the larger landscape by incorporating adjacent private and leased lands into the grazing system. Approximately 340 acres of private land will be retained in grass cover in a deferred grazing system. This land, which was formerly enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program, would have probably been broken and put into crop production if not for its incorporation into this grazing system. An additional 340 acres of native range that previously experienced continuous grazing will be converted to a rest-rotation grazing system. Tying in these adjacent lands enhances and conserves these habitats while reducing grazing pressures on the WMA.

Extension of this lease would also provide economic benefits to the local community by providing spring and summer grazing for up to 100 cow/calf pairs (436 AUMs). This grazing opportunity would allow an area rancher to maintain their existing livestock operation.

10. Alternatives

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. The grazing system, which incorporates 680 acres of adjacent lands, would no longer be operated. Grazing on one of the pastures would return back to season long continuous grazing and a second seeded pasture would likely revert back to cropland, reducing abundance and quality of wildlife habitat. 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, and vigor of vegetation for ungulates and other herbivores. The absence of grazing could result in an increase in fire fuels and wildfire risk if grazing is removed for a substantial period of time.

Also, in the absence of this lease, there would be a minimum short-term loss of 300 AUMs and a potential loss of 436 AUMs of total grazing in the community. There would be some decrease in maintenance costs and FWP staff time related to monitoring grazing and maintaining the interior grazing system fences if the grazing lease is not extended.

Alternative B: Proposed Action

Under the proposed action alternative, the grazing system that has been in place over the past 23 years would be modified to include adjacent private and leased lands (Appendix C). The lease period would be for 6 years until December 31, 2020. This newly-designed system would decrease the amount of grazing and increase the frequency of rest treatments on the WMA. The average number of AUMs grazed on the WMA would decrease from 300 AUMs to 264 AUMs.

The rest-rotation grazing system treatments would provide a mosaic of vegetation heights and structure. 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, these grazed pastures would provide areas with reduced vegetation that are preferred nesting habitats for other species of grassland birds. The modified rest-rotation grazing system would provide 1-2 years of complete rest and 2-3 years of grazing deferment during the growing season which would provide pastures with increased vegetation heights and cover beneficial for upland nesting birds, small mammals, and many other wildlife species. Periodic grazing will help maintain productive forage for ungulates, while providing a diversity of grassland conditions for nesting birds and other wildlife. Grazing would result in a decrease in fire fuels and wildfire risk.

There would be some increased costs for maintenance of interior pasture fences. Due to recent increases in water levels there will be a need to reroute a portion of the interior fence between the middle and south pastures. The lessee would be responsible for routine fence maintenance and weed control which would reduce FWP employee time and money needed to maintain boundary fences.

Alternative C: Status Quo

Under this alternative the grazing lease on the property would be extended for an additional 6 years, but would be grazed under the current three pasture rest-rotation grazing system. The WMA would be grazed at a stocking rate of 300 AUMs from May 15th-September 15th (75 cow/calf pairs) annually. There would be no inclusion of adjacent private/leased lands in the grazing system. The rest-rotation grazing system would still provide a heterogeneous mix of vegetation heights and structures, but WMA pastures would experience slightly higher stocking rates and fewer/shorter periods of rest than the proposed action alternative. Some of the adjacent private land could be converted to crop production.

Departmental monetary costs and employee time for monitoring of the lease and maintenance of the grazing system would be similar to the proposed action alternative.

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:						

1b. Hoof action from livestock grazing can have impacts on soil compaction and erosion under heavy grazing pressure. The proposed stocking rate on this WMA and the 2-3 years of growing season rest each pasture would receive in the grazing rotation should minimize impacts to soil quality. Soil compaction could occur periodically in localized areas such as around water sources and mineral (salt) blocks. Assessment of past grazing by FWP staff, as recently as summer 2014, has identified no significant impacts to soils or increases in erosion. Soils condition appears to have improved since the current grazing system was implemented. There has been a decrease in bare soils and historic head cutting and other forms of accelerated erosion have stabilized with the establishment of perennial grass cover. The presence of cryptogams and litter indicate stable soils. At times in the proposed grazing schedule, individual pastures would experience short-term increases in grazing pressure, but the overall reduction in grazing pressure on the WMA and the increased rest periods are expected to provide a net benefit to soils on the WMA compared to current grazing.

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				

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				

3h. The presence of livestock could increase 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 would have a moderate stocking rate (264 AUM). Livestock grazing on this WMA would be limited to more disperse spring/summer grazing. Livestock would be 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 expected 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				

4a. Grazing can impact the diversity, productivity, abundance, and standing cover of plant species. 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 proposed moderate stocking rate and the grazing rotation, which includes seasonal deferment and yearlong rest, should support productivity and overall health of native vegetation on the WMA. The majority of the riparian areas on the WMA are separated from grazing by a large wetland area, which would minimize potential impacts to riparian vegetation.

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. Cattle grazed on this WMA would spend the winter and fall on land immediately adjacent to the WMA and would be 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. Any potential establishment or spread of noxious weeds would be mitigated by monitoring of weeds by the lessee and FWP staff followed by chemical and/or biological treatment as part of ongoing weed management on Region 6 WMAs. The presence of a lessee on the WMA may help in earlier identification and more effective control of noxious weeds. Also, using livestock grazing to maintain native vegetation in a healthy and productive state helps armor the WMA from weed invasion.

** 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				

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. Species found on the WMA that have been shown to prefer areas that are grazed periodically include ungulates, Upland Sandpipers, Chestnut-collared Longspurs, Long-billed Curlews, Horned Larks, Killdeer, Western Meadowlarks, Marbled Godwits, Willets, Common Nighthawks, McCown's Longspurs, Canada Geese, and black-tailed prairie dogs. Other species found on the WMA benefit from increased residual grass cover, such as Vesper Sparrow, Sprague's Pipit, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Ring-necked Pheasants, American Bittern, Great Blue Heron, Grasshopper Sparrow, and several species of waterfowl and small mammals. These lists of species are not a complete list of wildlife species present on the WMA, but represent the variety of species and their varying habitat preferences. In addition to benefits on the WMA and adjacent native habitats, the system would also conserve 340 acres of seeded grassland, which would likely go back into tillage crop production if the grazing system were not in place.

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 is potential habitat for Sprague's pipit (a candidate T&E species) present on this site. Sprague's Pipits have been recorded during past surveys conducted by FWP personnel. There are several Species of Concern or Potential Species of Concern that have also been recorded 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 livestock grazing including the McCown's Longspur, Long-billed curlew, Chestnut collared longspur, Baird's sparrow 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 proposed stocking rate of this WMA and the rest treatments provided in the grazing rotation would provide a mosaic of grazed and ungrazed pastures and would provide habitat both for species preferring taller, denser vegetative structure and species preferring less standing vegetative cover.

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				

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:						

7a. The extension of the grazing lease would extend the positive impacts realized since 1992 pertaining the productivity and profitability of land use in this area. The proposed grazing system would incorporate surrounding private land and leased properties in the grazing system. Eliminating grazing from the WMA would result in a loss of 264 AUMs and the potential loss of up to 172 AUMs on surrounding properties. The grazing system would help prevent conversion of 340 acres of adjacent land back to crop production.

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				

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				

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:						

10e. The revenue generated by this grazing lease was $3,423.00 in 2014. The proposed change in the grazing system would reduce the total AUMs on the WMA. Although AUMs would decrease, revenue would likely be similar to 2014 levels due to projected increases in the grazing rate ($/AUM) charged. The grazing rate charged for use of this WMA is based on the standard Department of Natural Resources (DNRC) grazing rate. This rate is calculated using 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 is scheduled to increase in 2016.

10f. The primary maintenance costs associated with this grazing lease proposal would be 1) costs related to monitoring and administrating the grazing lease and 2) maintenance of grazing system fencing. Boundary fencing maintenance is required regardless of livestock grazing on the WMA. Routine fence maintenance (interior and boundary) is currently performed by the lessee and these maintenance costs would increase for FWP if the lease was not extended. Weed control costs on the WMA would likely be comparable regardless of grazing. Currently, the lessee conducts weed control and monitoring. Failure to renew the grazing lease would increase the time and expense for FWP staff on weed control. The lack of livestock on the WMA could reduce potential spread of weeds and potential future weed control expenses. One of the existing pasture fences will require rerouting because of higher water levels associated with Milk River channel migration during the 2011 flood. Estimated cost to replace the fence would be approximately $15,000. There are approximately 2.25 miles of boundary fence that have silted in and will need to be replaced within the next 6-years. Since this is a boundary fence, it would require replacement regardless of the alternative selected.

Additional Maintenance Costs expected if grazing lease is approved (approximate):

Boundary fence maintenance: $15,000 + $300/year for annual interior fence maintenance
Administrative costs related to monitoring of grazing system: $300/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				

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				

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				

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. It is unexpected that there would be substantial controversy raised by extension of this lease or that the controversy resulting from extension of this lease would be greater than the potential controversy caused by failure to renew the 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 Wildlife Management Area (WMA) for the past 23 years. The current proposal is to modify this grazing system to incorporate additional pastures on adjacent private and leased properties. Incorporation of these properties would expand the benefits of rotational grazing beyond the boundaries of the WMA. It would also reduce overall grazing pressure and provide additional periods of rest for pastures on the WMA. The proposed action would not result in any foreseeable significant negative 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. Potential minor impacts to the soil, vegetation, and wildlife were identified. The impacts from continuing grazing on this WMA on the vegetation and wildlife would vary by species. The proposed grazing system would provide a mosaic of vegetation conditions and heights to promote use by a diversity of wildlife species on the WMA. Livestock grazing will help remove senescent vegetation, which can improve plant productivity as well as quality and availability of forage for wildlife. The grazing rotation would include multiple pastures that are rested during the growing season, providing areas with increased vegetation heights and densities and also grazed areas where vegetative cover and heights are reduced. Grazing would reduce fire fuel loads and may reduce wildfire potential.

PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. Public Involvement

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 7:00 pm in the Hill County Electric Hospitality Room on February 19th.

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

2. Duration of comment period, if any.

The public comment period will extend for 30 days starting February 4th, 2015. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 pm on March 5th, 2015 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

Literature Cited

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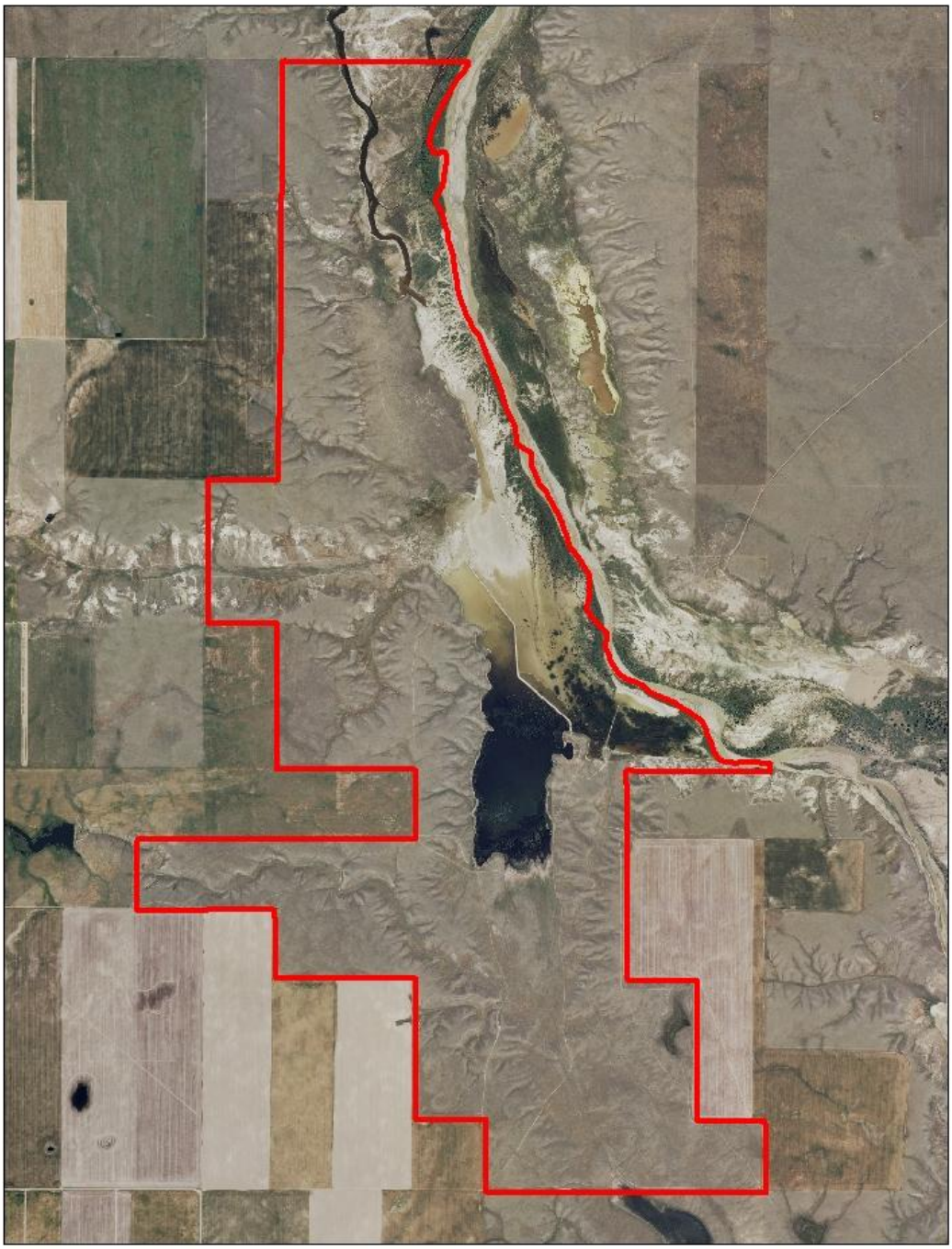
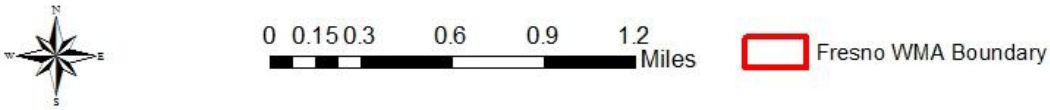
Appendix A

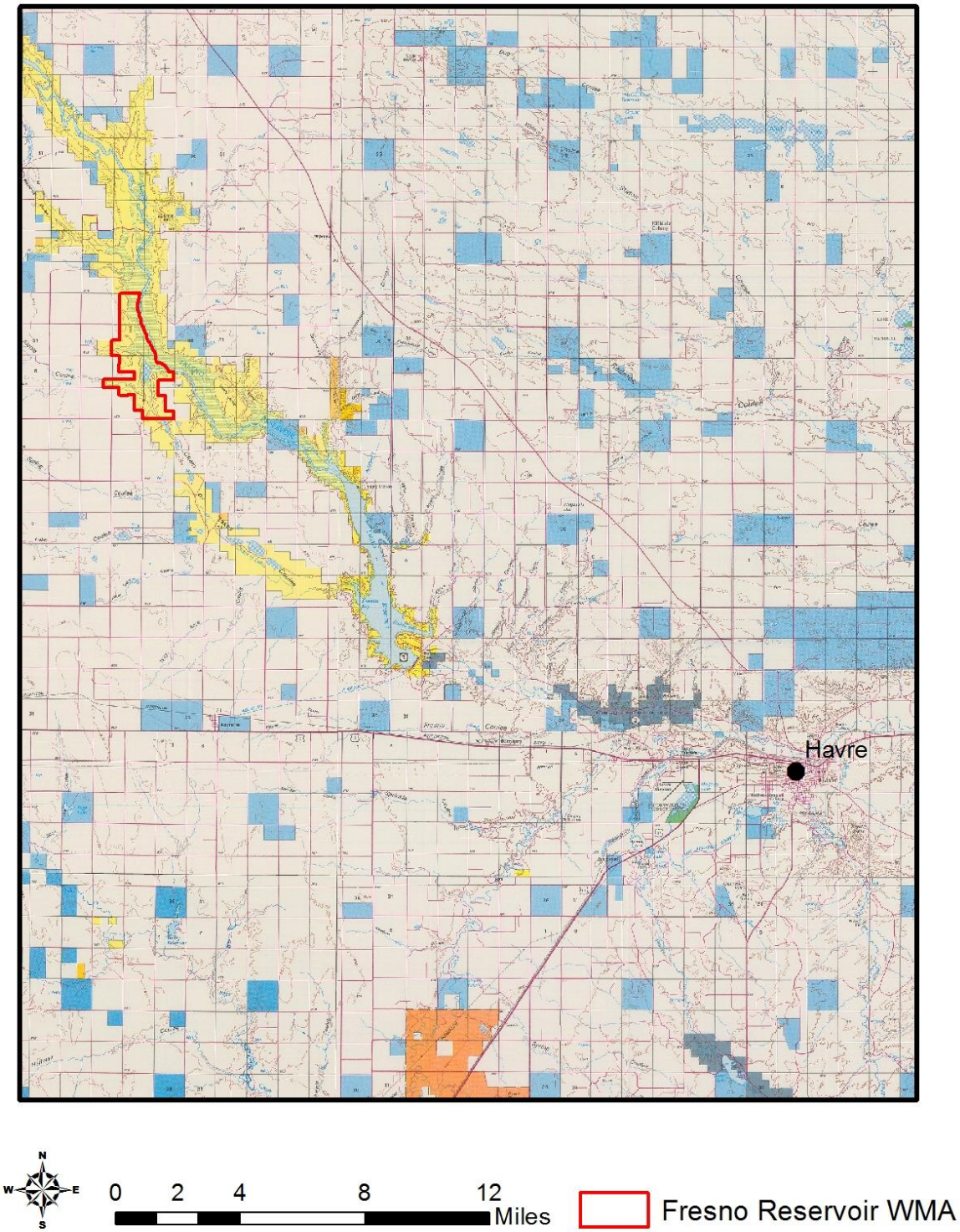
Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area





Appendix B

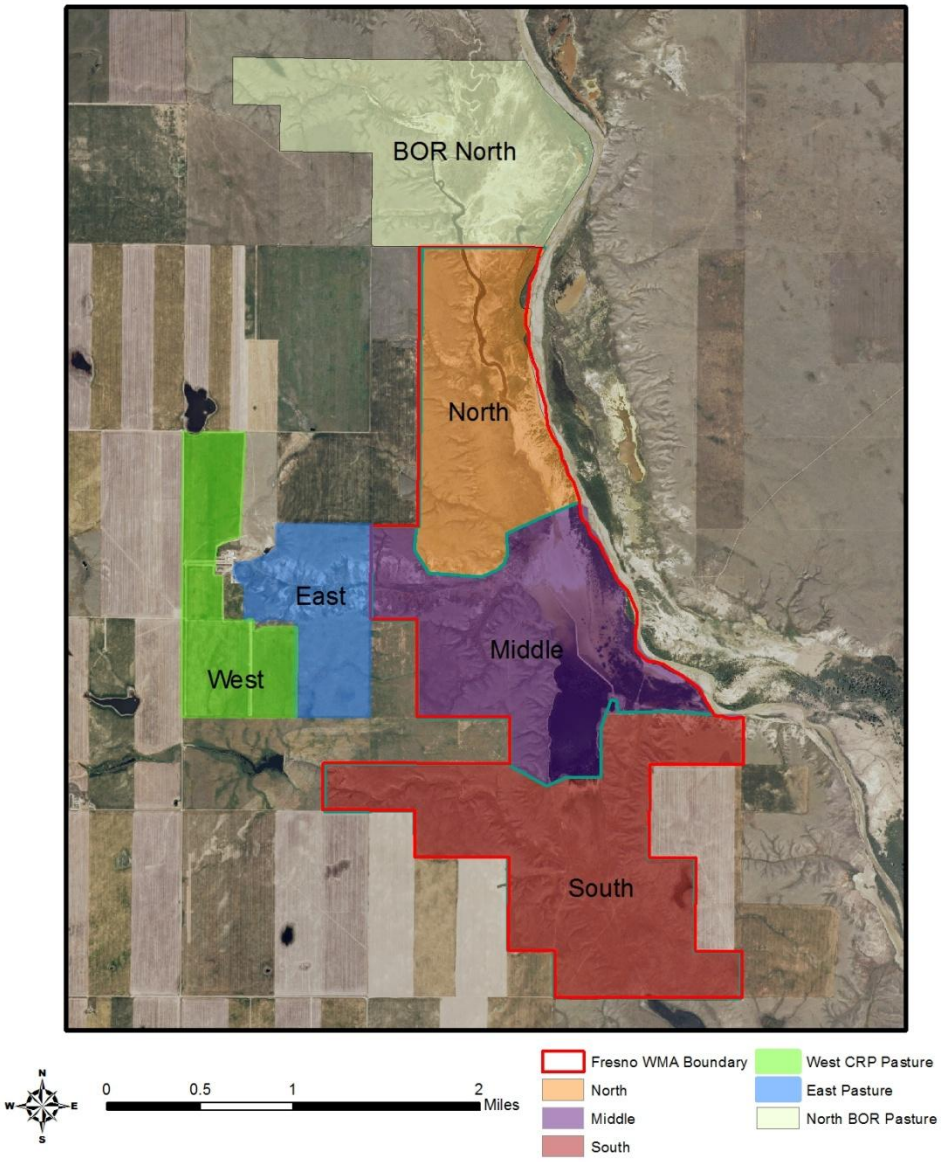
Fresno Reservoir Wildlife Management Area



Appendix C

The proposed grazing system consists of three pastures on the WMA (North, Middle, and South) and three pastures (East, West, and BOR North) provided by the lessee. One of the lessee provided pastures is primarily native range (East Pasture). The second private pasture (West Pasture) is predominantly non-native grasses. The third pasture (BOR North) is primarily native range. There will be 100 cow/calf pairs grazing in this system from May 15th until no later than September 27th. After this period livestock will be moved to a separate Bureau of Reclamation lease pasture where the livestock will remain for approximately 1.6 months. After this livestock may either return to West CRP Pasture for 12 days during years the pasture is scheduled for late grazing or move to a separate winter pasture.

Fresno Reservoir WMA Grazing System Pastures



Appendix C (Continued)

Year	Lessee West Pasture		Lessee East Pasture		Lessee BOR North Pasture		WMA North		WMA Middle		WMA South		WMA Total AUMs
	Treatment	AUMs	Treatment	AUMs	Treatment	AUMs	Treatment	AUMs	Treatment	AUMs	Treatment	AUMs	
2015	A[1]	100	B[1]	80	B[3]	144	C		A[2]	100	B[2]	156	256
2016	B[1]	136	C		B[3]	144	A	200	B[2]	100	C		300
2017	A	120	A	80	B[3]	144	B	236	C		C		236
2018	B	120	B	80	B[3]	144	C		C		A[3]	236	236
2019	A[1]	100	C		B[3]	144	C		A[2]	100	B	236	336
2020	B[1]	136	A[1]	80	B[3]	144	A[2]	120	B[1]	100	C		220

A = May 15 – July 15	Livestock can graze the entire growing season.
A[1] = May 15 – June 15	Grazing could occur until June 15, but livestock could come out early when grazing in East pasture.
A[2] = June 9 – July 15	Grazing could occur starting June 9 to accommodate livestock leaving the East pasture. Otherwise grazing would normally start June 15.
A[3] = May 15 – July 27	The late August 1 date accommodates the extra 12 days needed when the B treatment not on the WMA (West and East Pastures).
B = July 15 – September 27	Livestock can graze the entire post-seed ripe season.
B[1] = July 15 – August 15 = November 3-November 15	Grazing could occur until August 15, but livestock could come out early when grazing in East pasture. Livestock could also return to West Pasture from November 3-November 15th
B[2] = August 9 – September 27	Grazing could occur starting August 9 to accommodate livestock leaving the East pasture. Otherwise grazing would normally start August 15.
B[3] = September 15 – November 15	Grazing only occurs in the BOR North Pasture for ~48 days during this time, after which livestock move to winter pasture or West CRP Pasture
C = Rest	Complete Grazing Rest