



MONTANA **FWP**

MONTANA STATE PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: May 27, 2021

Agenda Item: Chief Plenty Coups State Park Agricultural 10-Year Lease

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Min

Background: Situated within the Crow Indian Reservation in south-central Montana, 40 minutes south of Billings, this day-use park preserves the log home, sacred spring, and farmstead of Chief Plenty Coups. This state park is a National Historic Landmark. Plenty Coups (Aleek-chea-ahoosh, meaning "many achievements") was a man of war - and then a man of peace - whose vision has helped bridge a gap between two cultures. Recognized for his bravery and leadership, he was made a chief of the Apsáalooke (Crow) tribe by age 28. When Plenty Coups gave up his nomadic ways in 1884, he became one of the first Apsáalooke to own and settle on a farm, which was deeded to him through the federal Indian Allotment Act. On his 320-acre tract, located a half mile east of Pryor, he opened a general store, built a home, and tilled the earth until his death in 1932 at age 84. At that time, as requested by Plenty Coups and his wife, Strikes the Iron, 195-acres of his land was made into a public park. Upon his death, the Apsáalooke people voted to designate him as their last traditional tribal chief.

This proposed ten-year lease would continue a farm and hay lease at Chief Plenty Coups State Park, would authorize the lessee to plant and farm crops (wheat, barley, oats, alfalfa or hay grasses) on approximately 60-acres, to cut hay on approximately 40 acres, and authorize a grazing of the farmland, typically to remove stubble after harvesting crops. Fifty percent of the proceeds would be dedicated to weed control on the park. This activity is allowed under the current management plan to maintain the historic aesthetics of the park, provide an effective and economic method for vegetation management, and to reduce potential fire fuels. The proposed lease would commence spring/summer 2021 and would expire December 31, 2031 with the option to renew for another 10 years. Agricultural activities would take place between April 1 and September 30 of each subsequent year depending on the onset of spring. This method of managing the non-cultural areas of the park has been utilized since the 1980's, furthermore agricultural use of the land has been present since the Chief's house began construction in 1884. These areas of the park are in good condition and this proposed lease will perpetuate this good condition. In Chief Plenty Coups trust deed, he directed that the "house, spring, grove and trees" and the "park and recreation grounds" be maintained "by allowing a reliable tenant the use of the remainder of this land".

Public Involvement Process & Results: A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was solicited for a 30-day public review and comment period which concludes 5:00 p.m., May 19, 2021. To date, no comments have been received.

Alternatives and Analysis:

Proposed Action: Approve the 10-year lease proposal, to help to maintain the historic aesthetics of the park, provide an effective and economic method for vegetation management, and to reduce potential fire fuels.

No Action: A hay lease would not be initiated; FWP may not have the resources to conduct the management enhancement efforts at the proposed scale.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale: FWP recommends the Board approve the proposed, allowing the department to enter into 10-year lease to help to maintain the historic aesthetics of the park, provide an effective and economic method for vegetation management, and to reduce potential fire fuels.

Proposed Motion: I move the Parks and Recreation Board approve the above proposal allowing Fish, Wildlife and Parks to enter into 10-year lease, to plant and farm crops on approximately 60-acres, to cut hay on approximately 40 acres, and authorize a grazing of the farmland.