

# **FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET**

**Meeting Date:** June 19, 2019

**Agenda Item:** Robb-Ledford WMA Aspen Enhancement Project (R3)

**Division:** Wildlife

**Action Needed:** Final

**Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation:** 5 minutes

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## **Background**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes to conduct aspen habitat restoration treatments on 40 acres of forest on the Robb-Ledford Wildlife Management Area, Madison County. The treatments would involve commercial removal of conifer trees (both merchantable and sub-merchantable) through a combination of mechanized and nonmechanized methods. The objectives of the proposed treatments are to:

- maintain remaining intact aspen-dominated forest;
- restore productivity to decadent portions of aspen-dominated forest; and
- expand remaining intact aspen-dominated forest.

The proposed action would remove Douglas fir less than 24 inches diameter at breast height (DBH) and all Rocky Mountain juniper throughout and within 100 feet of a formerly aspen-dominated stand. Tree removal would be completed using ground-based logging systems and mechanized methods. Trees designated for cutting that are greater than eight inches DBH would be harvested and sold to forest product manufacturing facilities. Trees designated for cutting that are less than eight inches DBH would be felled or masticated. Remaining materials would be lopped and scattered or piled and burned. Live and dead conifers with signs of wildlife nesting activity would be retained as standing snags for wildlife. Roadside landings and slash piles would be reseeded after burning. Broadcast burning in areas where piling slash is not practical due to the volume of material may be considered in cooperation with Montana DNRC or BLM fire management specialists. Broadcast burning may also be necessary to stimulate suckering in aspen stands. This project is intended to benefit wintering moose, fawn-rearing habitat and late-fall browse resources for mule deer, winter browse for elk, ruffed-grouse habitat, surface water flowing from existing springs, and general wildlife species diversity.

## **Public Involvement Process & Results**

FWP completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed project, which was released for a 30-day public comment period on April 12, 2019. The public was notified that this EA was available for review and comment as follows:

- distribution via the FWP Region 3 interested persons list;
- one notice each in the *Madisonian* and *Dillon Tribune* newspapers
- public notice on the FWP web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

Copies of the draft EA were available for public review at FWP Region 3 Headquarters. No comments were received on this proposal.

## **Alternatives and Analysis**

Two alternatives were evaluated:

1. FWP would proceed as proposed.
2. FWP would not implement the proposed project on the WMA. A lack of treatment would allow the aspen habitats to continue to decline in productivity with continued Douglas fir succession.

## **Agency Recommendation & Rationale**

FWP recommends the commission approve this project to use commercial tree removal to enhance 40 acres of aspen-dominated forest on the Robb-Ledford WMA to maintain and improve wildlife habitat.

**Proposed Motion:** I move the commission approve the Robb-Ledford WMA aspen enhancement project as proposed by the department.