

FISH and WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: June 19, 2019

Agenda Item: Mt. Haggin WMA Addition Fee Title Acquisition

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background

FWP proposes to purchase in fee title a 160-acre parcel of private land adjacent to Mt. Haggin WMA for the appraised value of \$464,000. The property is owned by the Edna Schmeller Living Trust. Upon purchase, the property would be managed as part of Mt. Haggin WMA for its wildlife, fisheries and recreational values. It would not be incorporated into any existing grazing leases on the WMA. Motorized travel would be restricted to snow machine use December 2-May 15, consistent with management on the adjacent portion of the WMA.

The proposed acquisition is bordered by Mt. Haggin WMA on its western and southern boundaries. It contributes to the ecological function of the WMA and surrounding Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forest. It is part of the migration pathway for mule deer and elk, connecting winter range on the west side of the Continental Divide to calving/fawning areas and summer range east of the divide. Mid-seral lodgepole forests on the property provide calving/fawning areas and elk security in the fall. Wet meadows, aspen and willow stands provide year-round habitat for moose, beaver, black bear, ruffed grouse, short-tailed weasel and numerous other small mammals, neotropical birds, amphibians and reptiles. The property provides summer habitat for sandhill cranes, several species of songbirds, and foraging raptors. Oregon Creek which runs along the western portion of the property provides suitable habitat for brook trout. The proposed acquisition by FWP would ensure that Mt. Haggin WMA and this parcel would continue to serve the needs of wildlife, support native fish restoration and provide additional public access for hunting, angling, trapping, wildlife-watching and other recreational opportunities.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed action, which was released for public comment for 30 days (March 27-April 26, 2019). Legal notices were printed in the *Butte Montana Standard*, the *Anaconda Leader*, and *Helena Independent Record*. A news release was distributed to a standard list of media outlets interested in FWP Region 3 news. Copies of the EA or notification of its availability were emailed to neighboring landowners, interested parties, Region 3 headquarters and Butte Area Resource Office, and on the FWP website. Seventeen comments were received; all were in support of the proposed action. Comments are summarized in the Decision Notice to proceed, signed on 6 May 2019.

Alternatives and Analysis

Two alternatives were analyzed: FWP purchase this 160-acre parcel in fee-title, or not purchase it. If FWP were to pass on this opportunity, it is highly likely that the property would be developed for private recreational use, compromising both its conservation values and public recreational opportunities.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the Commission approve this acquisition. Purchasing this property would ensure that Mt. Haggin WMA and this parcel would continue to serve the needs of wildlife and provide additional public access for hunting, fishing, and other recreation.

Proposed Motion

I move that the commission give final approval for acquiring this addition to Mt. Haggin WMA.