



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: August 13, 2020

Agenda Item: Marten Reintroduction to the Little Belt Mountains

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 minutes

Background: Extirpated marten populations have been reestablished across their historical North American range, including in Montana, using translocations. The department and the Montana Natural Heritage Program developed a predictive habitat suitability model for marten, which indicates that the Little Belt and Castle Mountains include high quality unoccupied habitat. In 2014, the Fish and Wildlife Commission approved translocation of marten to the Little Belt Mountains.

Marten were historically present in the isolated ranges of central Montana including the Little Belt Mountains, but they were probably extirpated by the early 1900s. Extensive snow-track, camera trap, and genetic surveys recently conducted by the U.S. Forest Service and the department failed to confirm marten presence in the Little Belt Mountain complex. The department proposes translocating a minimum of 60 marten (at least 30 female) from southwestern Montana over two years to sites within the Little Belt Mountains. The goals of this project include restoring a native species to its historical range while increasing native species diversity, providing recreational viewing, and ultimately restoring marten harvest.

Public Involvement Process and Results: The commission directed the department to release an environmental assessment of the proposal for public review at their June 2020 meeting. The draft assessment was available for public comment for 21 days. FWP received 33 comments from individuals or groups supporting the project and one commenter encouraged the department to allow marten to recolonize the Little Belts naturally. No significant changes were made to the environmental assessment based on public comment. Region 4 Supervisor Gary Bertellotti signed a Decision Notice recommending that the commission approve the project on Aug. 4, 2020.

Alternatives and Analysis: Marten are poor dispersers, and they are unlikely to naturally recolonize the Little Belt Mountain complex. The species will likely remain absent from this range without a reintroduction, although no action remains an alternative.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale: The department recommends proceeding with a translocation of at least 60 marten from southwest Montana to the Little Belt Mountains between September 2020 and March 2022. The department expects to partner with Montana trappers to capture animals for relocation.

Proposed Motion:

I move that the commission vote to approve the environmental assessment and endorse the department's plans to restore marten to the Little Belt Mountains in central Montana.