



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: December 10, 2020

Agenda Item: Big Snowy Mountains WMA Land Project - Killam Property, Region 5

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

Background: FWP proposes a fee title acquisition of property for a potential Wildlife Management Area along the southeast foothills and grassland habitats of the Big Snowy Mountains. Commission endorsement of this proposal would provide for the possibility of purchasing an approximately 8,380-acre property known as the Killam Ranch. The property supports high wildlife habitat values including elk winter range and would be important for public hunting and accessing public lands in the Big Snowy Mountains.

The property comprises a mix of ponderosa, Douglas fir, Rocky Mountain juniper and aspen forest habitats, mixed and foothill grasslands, and 4 miles of spring creek and associated riparian habitat. The variety of habitats provide critical winter range for elk, mule deer, and antelope while supporting an estimated 22 wildlife species of concern. The property is adjacent to a Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest Big Snowies Wilderness Study Area, the BLM Twin Coulee Wilderness Study Area, and the Shodair private property that the commission endorsed for potential purchase at their August 13, 2020 meeting.

Public Involvement Process & Results: FWP has not sought formal public review of this proposal for this specific property. Upon endorsement by the commission, FWP would conduct an initial public scoping. Depending on the response, FWP may proceed further with an environmental analysis, including additional public involvement and review.

For clarification, FWP has already conducted initial public scoping on the previously endorsed neighboring property owned by Shodair Children's Hospital. That scoping, environmental analysis and additional public involvement for this proposal would help inform the potential for acquisition of one or both properties. Project partners involved to date include the Killam and Shodair landowners, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, BLM, and FWP.

Alternatives & Analysis: If the commission endorses this proposal, through its environmental analysis FWP would generate and analyze alternatives that would include options for acquiring either, both or neither the Killam and Shodair properties.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends approval of this proposal to conserve and enhance wildlife habitat and public recreation opportunities on this land and to provide access to adjacent public lands.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission endorse the proposal to purchase the Killam Ranch, allowing FWP to conduct further due diligence, analysis, and public review.