



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: January 6, 2020

Agenda Item: White Rock Coulee Right-of-Way Easement

Action Needed: Endorsement

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background: The White Rock Coulee Access Public Lands project would improve public access to 23,741 acres of BLM and DNRC administered lands in southern Phillips County. The complex contains approximately 19,913 acres of BLM and 3,828 acres of DNRC lands, with one main access point on the northern section and little public access to the remainder of the complex.

A private landowner adjacent to the western boundary of the White Rock Coulee complex has expressed interest in reaching an agreement for a 2-mile road right of way easement through their private property leading to the boundary of this large tract of public land. This project would secure year-round public access to the center of the White Rock Coulee area where there has been limited public access previously.

The area currently sees between 100 and 200 hunter days for mule deer, pronghorn, and upland game bird hunting opportunities. As antelope numbers increase, those hunter day figures are expected to increase as well. This project would also provide for year-round access for other outdoor recreation opportunities such as, viewing sage grouse on leks, hiking, and birding for short grass prairie birds on the public land complex.

Public Involvement Process & Results: An Environmental Assessment and subsequent public involvement process will be implemented, pending Fish & Wildlife Commission endorsement.

Alternatives and Analysis: Proposed Action: FWP proposes to purchase a perpetual road right of way easement across private land to provide year-round permanent public access to the White Rock Coulee public land complex. This project would improve public access to public land for hunting, hiking, camping, wildlife viewing, and other year-round recreational activities through the Home to Hunt License funding account established via 87-2-526 (5), MCA. This earmarked account is to be used to acquire public hunting access to inaccessible public lands. The department also utilizes these funds to improve access to otherwise under-accessible public lands.

No Action Alternative: FWP would not purchase a road right of way access easement. Public access could be lost or minimized should the private property sell or change management. This area has seen large turnover in land ownership and changes in public access during hunting season over the past decade.

Proposed Motion: I move the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve proceeding with further analysis and conducting an environmental assessment for a permanent public access road right of way easement to provide public access to the White Rock Coulee Complex in southern Phillips County.