



# MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

**Meeting Date:** June 25, 2020

**Agenda Item:** Confluentus Corner FAS (Thompson River), R1

**Action Needed:** Final

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

---

**Background:** FWP proposes to purchase 40-acres on the lower Thompson River from The Conservation Fund to be managed as an undeveloped, walk-in Fishing Access Site approximately five miles east of Thompson Falls. The property contains intact upland and riparian habitat and would provide access to approximately 2,500 feet of river frontage along both banks of the Thompson River. Since 1982, the Thompson River has averaged over 8,000 annual angler days with a maximum of over 13,000 in 2015. The mainstem fishery primarily consists of rainbow and brown trout, but many of the river's intact tributaries provide excellent spawning and rearing habitat for native bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout. A recent study conducted on the Thompson River verified that bull trout which originate in its tributaries spend a considerable amount of time in the mainstem Thompson River. The lower seven miles of the Thompson River possess the coldest water and provides the best habitat for native fish. The property is located close to the Mount Silcox Wildlife Management Area, and adjacent to U.S. Forest Service administered land. It provides excellent wildlife habitat for bighorn sheep, elk, deer and other game and non-game species. Purchase of this property would prevent residential development, which would preserve sensitive fish and wildlife habitat and allow for continued terrestrial wildlife movement while allowing the public to enjoy a primitive fishing access experience. Purchase of this FAS would be funded by \$150,000 from Avista, \$100,000 from Northwestern Energy, \$40,000 from FWP and \$5,000 from the Westslope Chapter of Trout Unlimited.

**Public Involvement Process & Results:** FWP released an EA for public comment from March 13 to April 13, 2020. Legal notices were published in the Sanders County Ledger, Clark Fork Valley Press, The Missoulian, and Helena Independent Record. The EA was posted on the FWP webpage. Notices were sent to all adjoining landowners. FWP received 13 public comments on the proposed acquisition. All issues raised by those who commented are addressed in the decision document. All public comments were generally supportive.

**Alternatives and Analysis:** Two alternatives were analyzed and considered in the EA: 1) Alternative A (No Action) - FWP would not purchase the property. The lots would remain private and closed to public access. The lots would likely be developed with septic systems, dwellings, and roads. Some level of modification to the riparian vegetation would likely occur; and 2) Alternative B (Proposed Action) - FWP would acquire forty acres of property along the Thompson River for inclusion in the statewide FAS system. The new FAS would be day-use only and managed for walk-in access with minimal development. Acquisition of the property would ensure future public access and resource protection and would preclude private development that would likely include roads, residences, septic systems, and other disturbances that could negatively impact this important aquatic and recreational resource. The existing roadbed between the highway and the river would be closed to vehicle traffic and parking would be restricted to the pull-out area upstream of the property.

**Agency Recommendation & Rationale:** FWP recommends the commission approve the purchase of this 40-acre property along the banks of the lower Thompson River so the area can be used and enjoyed by the recreating public in perpetuity.

**Proposed Motion:** I move the commission approve FWP's purchase of the Confluentus Corner FAS on the Thompson River.