



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

THE **OUTSIDE** IS IN US ALL.

Meeting Date: June 24, 2021

Agenda Item: North Shore WMA Agricultural Lease Renewal, Region 1

Action Needed: Final Approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: The 427-acre North Shore Wildlife Management Area (NSWMA) was acquired between 2008-2016 because of the unique wildlife habitat values offered, particularly for migrating waterfowl. The property is primarily cultivated land that was under threat of housing development. These cropped areas adjacent to Kalispell Bay on Flathead Lake are strategically located and heavily used by spring migrating waterfowl. The 2018 WMA management plan identified agriculture as the primary tool for achieving management objectives including providing feeding habitat for migratory waterfowl and upland birds, and providing hunting and bird watching opportunities.

FWP proposes to renew an agricultural lease on the NSWMA for a five-year term (2021–2026), whereby the lessee continues to cultivate 350 acres, harvesting up to 80% of the crops, while leaving 20% standing for the benefit of wildlife, primarily migratory waterfowl and upland game birds. The objective of renewing the lease is to continue providing enhanced forage for waterfowl during spring migration, cover for upland birds, and weed management associated with the lease area.

Public Involvement Process & Results: A draft environmental assessment was completed by FWP and released for public comment April 23 – May 13, 2021. Notices were published on the FWP website, and in the Flathead Beacon, Daily Interlake, and Bigfork Eagle. The one comment received was outside the scope of this action. The Decision Notice recommends proceeding with the lease renewal, contingent on commission approval.

Alternatives and Analysis:

Proposed Alternative: Renewal of the NSWMA Agricultural Lease. Wildlife, particularly waterfowl, would benefit from forage and cover created in the farmed areas especially in unharvested areas left for wildlife. The lessee, FWP, and hunters would mutually benefit through the crop-share agreement.

No Action Alternative: Agricultural lease would not be renewed. The mutual benefits of farming would be lost. FWP would need to commit resources to manage weeds, and migratory waterfowl would be negatively impacted by the lack of food resources during migration. Other wildlife would decline due to loss of forage and cover.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends the commission approve the NSWMA agricultural lease renewal, recognizing the multiple benefits derived from this arrangement.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission approve renewal of the North Shore Wildlife Management Area agricultural lease as proposed.