



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: October 20, 2022

Agenda Item: Danford Pond Wildlife Viewing Area Easement Acquisition and Construction

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: The department proposes to acquire an Easement for Public Viewing Access and build an associated bird-viewing area on the property at the corner of North Somers Road and Manning Road in Kalispell. The proposed viewing area will be within the existing 34-acre Danford Pond Conservation Easement and will provide a safe viewing opportunity for the public to observe wildlife species within and adjacent to Reed's Slough. The Easement for Public Viewing Access would be donated to FWP and does not require funding. The construction of the viewing area will use funding from the Nongame Tax Check-off account. The Nongame Tax Check-off workplan identifies wildlife viewing projects that increase access as a priority.

To mitigate traffic hazards, the department plans to construct a gravel parking area to accommodate wildlife viewing along North Somers Road. The parking area would be large enough to accommodate a school bus, so the viewing area would also provide a venue for school groups to learn about the migratory waterfowl of Montana. The planned viewing area would include a raised trail to a platform, an informational kiosk, signage, and permanent public-use binoculars.

Public Involvement Process and Results: The department released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for public review on June 10, 2022 and asked for public comment through July 5. The department held a virtual public information meeting on June 21, 2021 and ran legal ads describing the proposed project, the availability of the draft EA, and the public hearing information in the *Flathead Beacon*, *Daily Inter Lake*, *Hungry Horse News*, and *Independent Record*. The department also mailed postcards to neighboring landowners. The draft EA was posted on the department's website and at Region 1 headquarters. Additional public comment will be solicited for a four-week period starting Aug. 26. Public comments will be posted online and provided to commissioners no later than two weeks prior to the October commission meeting.

Analysis and Alternatives: The EA evaluated the proposed action and found no significant impacts on the human or physical environment. Through the public review process, the public raised some minor issues and concerns that were addressed in the published decision notice. The EA evaluated a no action alternative and found that while the Danford Conservation Easement would continue to protect wildlife at Reed's Slough, the traffic hazards associated with bird watchers parking along North Somers Road would continue, and there would be no venue for school groups to use the site.

Alternative A: The commission may approve the acquisition of an easement and construction for public use.

Alternative B: The commission may choose to deny the acquisition and any construction.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale: The department recommends the commission endorse the proposed action to acquire an Easement for Public Viewing at the Danford Pond Conservation Easement, at no cost, and construct a parking area and wildlife-viewing area using funds from the Nongame Tax Check-off account.

Proposed Motion: I move that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the acquisition of an Easement for Public Viewing at the Danford Pond Conservation Easement and construct a parking area and associated bird-viewing area (Alternative A) as presented by the department.