



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION FWP PROPOSAL & INFORMATION SHEET

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Meeting Date: June 20, 2024

Agenda Item: Beartooth WMA Grazing Lease Renewal, Region 4

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: FWP is proposing to renew a six-year grazing lease on a portion of the 36,000-acre Beartooth Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The proposed grazing lease would continue to utilize rest-rotation and spot treatment grazing to maintain and enhance fish and wildlife habitat on approximately 9,520 acres of the Beartooth WMA. The proposed lease would also incorporate 26,300 deeded acres of the Sieben Live Stock Company, 2,200 acres of Bureau of Land Management land, and 320 acres of Department of Natural Resources and Conservation land -- into the grazing system. The total area encompassed by this proposed grazing lease arrangement is about 38,340 acres. Incorporating 26,300 acres of private lands in the grazing system greatly increases FWP's ability to maintain and/or enhance habitat for wildlife and fisheries on a larger landscape, not just on the WMA. Livestock grazing has been used successfully as a habitat enhancement tool in cooperation with neighboring Sieben Live Stock Company since 1992.

This system is expected to provide habitat benefits particularly for elk, mule and white-tailed deer, ruffed and dusky grouse, and a variety of nongame wildlife species. Some of the goals include: providing vegetative cover (abundance) and quality plant composition (nutrition/palatability); promoting plant production, vigor, and nutrient content; increasing the attractiveness of spring, summer, and late fall forage to elk; expanding the effective influence of the WMA for wintering elk by bringing adjacent private land into similar management while simultaneously meeting landowner needs and tolerance to big game; healing bare ground and reducing/stopping soil loss; enhancing growth and restoration of native and other desirable plant species; utilizing hoof action of livestock to break soil crust and plant seeds in the deferred (graze after seed ripe) treatment; and stimulating root structure and building drought resistance through periods of grazing rest in the system. The proposed lease arrangement also includes provisions for continuing to provide public hunting access on Sieben Live Stock Company deeded lands.

Public Involvement Process & Results: An Environmental Assessment and subsequent Decision Notice were completed for this same grazing lease in 2018. This proposal is a renewal of the lease without any changes. The proposed lease renewal was discussed at the Devil's Kitchen Working Group meeting on March 19. Public comments on the proposed action will be accepted through the commission process.

Alternatives & Analysis: Two alternatives were analyzed: proceed with the proposed action or take no action. The grazing lease serves to improve elk and mule deer habitat while also benefiting neighboring private lands and the public. These benefits would cease and land maintenance responsibilities for the department would increase if the lease was not renewed.

Alternative A: The commission may choose to approve the grazing lease with the Sieben Live Stock Company.

Alternative B: The commission may choose to not approve the lease.



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Agency Recommendation & Rationale: The department recommends that the commission approve the Beartooth WMA lease for a six-year term beginning in May 2025. All of the benefits and cooperative relations with a neighboring landowner would continue.

Proposed Motion: I move that the Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the six-year grazing lease renewal with the Sieben Live Stock Company as presented by the department.