



4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405
March 2, 2021

Dear Interested Parties:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) is seeking to offer bid on a 6-year agricultural lease opportunity on the Beckman Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The bid process seeks to establish a mutually beneficial haying lease with MFWP, wherein lessee irrigates and hays one (or possibly two) cuttings grass/alfalfa fields totaling ~75 acres, and then will continue irrigating the fields for fall wildlife forage. Summary and terms of the proposed lease opportunity is included in the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA).

MFWP is currently seeking review and public comment on the Draft Environmental Assessment for this proposed agricultural lease. The EA may be obtained by viewing MFWP's website <http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/environmentalAssessments/>. A 21-day public review and comment period will be available March 2 – March 23, 2021. Comments may be made online on the EA webpage or may be directed by mail or e-mail to the addresses below. Comments must be received by MFWP no later than 5:00pm on March 23, 2021.

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks - Beckman WMA Ag Lease
Attn: Sonja Andersen
Lewistown Area Office
333 Airport Rd
Lewistown, MT 59457
or email comments to: sandersen@mt.gov

As part of the decision-making process under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), a Decision Notice for this EA will be issued soon following the end of comment period. The Draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline. The Montana Fish & Wildlife Commission has the final decision-making authority over MFWP lease proposals and will make their determination on this lease at their April 1, 2021 meeting.

Thank you for your interest and involvement,

Sincerely,

Gary Bertellotti
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 4 Supervisor
gbertellotti@mt.gov
(406) 454-5840



**Draft Environmental Assessment
MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 Checklist
BECKMAN WMA AGRICULTURAL LEASE**



PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

- 1. Type of proposed state action:** Implement a six-year agricultural (hay) lease on the Beckman Wildlife Management Area (WMA) between Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) and a competent lessee (hereafter, “Lessee”).
- 2. Agency authority for the proposed action:** MTFWP has the authority under Section 87-1-210 MCA to protect, enhance, and regulate the use of Montana’s fish and wildlife resources for public benefit now and in the future. In addition, in accordance with Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), MFWP is required to assess the impacts that any proposal or project might have on the natural and human environments. Further, MFWP’s land lease-out policy, as it pertains to the disposition of interest in Department lands (89-1-209) requires an Environmental Assessment (EA) to be written for all new agricultural leases, lease extensions, or lease renewals.
- 3. Anticipated schedule:**
 - a. Anticipated Commencement Date:** 30 April 2021
 - b. Estimated Completion Date:** 1 October 2027
- 4. Location affected by proposed action (county, range, and township – include map):**

Beckman Wildlife Management Area
Fergus County, 18N, 16E, Sections 4, 5
Fergus County, 19N, 16E, Section 33

A map is provided at the end of this document.

5. Project size (estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

| | <u>Acres</u> |
|------------------------------------|--------------|
| a. Developed: | |
| i. Residential | <u>0</u> |
| ii. Industrial | <u>0</u> |
| b. Open Space/Woodlands/Recreation | <u>0</u> |
| c. Wetlands/Riparian Areas | <u>0</u> |
| d. Floodplain | <u>0</u> |
| e. Productive: | |
| i. Irrigated cropland | <u>75</u> |
| ii. Dry cropland | <u>0</u> |
| iii. Forestry | <u>0</u> |
| iv. Rangeland | <u>0</u> |
| v. Other | <u>0</u> |

6. Listing of any other Local, State, or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction:

- a. Permits: N/A
- b. Funding: Lessee and MFWP cost share – no cash lease
- c. Other overlapping or additional jurisdictional responsibilities: N/A

7. Narrative summary of the proposed action: The Beckman Wildlife Management Area (WMA) encompasses over 6,600 acres. The land was purchased for the primary purpose of supporting year-round mule deer habitat, but the WMA supports other ungulates as well as game birds and many other species of wildlife associated with the Judith River bottom, breaks, and bench habitats. In prairie breaks environments, winter survival of ungulates depends largely on fat accumulation and storage during summer and autumn months. In central Montana, among other forage sources, ungulates are particularly attracted to actively growing (irrigated) alfalfa hay fields. This source of highly nutritious forage helps accrue winter reserves, particularly during droughty periods. In addition to the nutritional benefits, ungulates congregating in these areas can provide hunting and viewing opportunities. Despite these advantages, producing (irrigated) alfalfa hay for wildlife is laborious and expensive.

This proposed 75-acre agricultural lease would provide high quality forage for mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, and other species by enhancing the quantity and quality of alfalfa hay/grass mix produced on two irrigated hayfields located along the Judith River on the Beckman WMA.

By establishing a 6-year no cash lease with a local producer, the overall Beckman agricultural program would be efficient and cost-effective. The lessee would be awarded

the first (and possibly second) cutting of alfalfa hay but would continue to irrigate into early fall, leaving the fields in a lush productive condition for wildlife.

Historically, it has proven difficult to find and keep a long-term lessee to completely fulfill the terms of the hay lease. The Beckman WMA is a relatively remote location, and the administrative roads leading to the hayfields are steep and can be rough on equipment. The distance traveled and time-commitment to properly irrigate alfalfa hay have not “penciled out” for producers in the past. MFWP is proposing to put this lease again out for bid, to determine if there are any interested local producers and to provide some level of flexibility to help assure feasibility for producers while accomplishing wildlife habitat objectives. The bid process would allow prospective lessees to submit bid proposals for how they could make the hay lease feasible for their own operations. FWP would select the bid that is most beneficial for wildlife, particularly mule deer.

The bid opportunity would include certain outside parameters including:

- 1) Hay lease must be irrigated and managed to produce a hay crop consistent with site productivity during each year of the lease.
- 2) FWP provides the irrigation equipment including pump, wheel and hand line systems. FWP will pay for electricity costs and irrigation equipment repairs. Other costs and inputs will be the responsibility of the lessee including farming and associated equipment, hauling, and the like. Periodic field renovation costs will be the responsibility of the lessee, unless otherwise specified in the bid proposal.
- 3) Lessee shall harvest no more than 2 cuttings of hay. Limiting the lease to one cutting may be better for wildlife, but may not be feasible for operators, thus this allowance to be specified as part of the bid proposal.
- 4) The final cutting must be harvested and removed from irrigated fields by August 15 each year.
- 5) Irrigation shall take place subsequent to final harvest to establish lush re-growth of alfalfa dedicated to benefiting wildlife.
- 6) Lessee will record condition of both fields with a minimum of 5 images per field and a written narrative that describes the work accomplished during the irrigation season, hay harvested (number and type of bales), and the results of follow-up irrigation.
- 7) Use of fields by deer, elk, and other wildlife is an intended purpose of this haying lease, and will not be considered a game damage concern during any time.
- 8) Dates and manner of harvest, irrigation treatments, fertilization, renovation, and other management activities may reflect a more competitive bid proposal for the benefit of mule deer and other wildlife.

8. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action. If the no action alternative is taken, these hay fields would green up briefly during spring, but then dry over the summer and remain decadent. The forage values provided for wildlife after the initial spring green-up would be

insignificant. In the absence of irrigation, these fields would become weedy and would require management action to restore them to permanent cover if they are not managed as productive irrigated hay fields. Additionally, surrounding private properties produce irrigated alfalfa on their lands. The attraction of these fields to ungulate species may draw animals off of WMA lands and onto private lands, leading to a loss of hunting/viewing opportunities and potential game damage complaints. MFWP does not have the employees, equipment, nor program funding to otherwise farm/hay these fields.

Alternative B: Proposed Action. If Alternative B is selected, MFWP would put the proposed action alternative out for bid. The proposed action would produce and provide high-quality forage for mule deer, white-tailed deer, elk, and other species on the Beckman WMA. Productive agricultural fields would be available to be utilized by ungulates during a critical time of year when animals need to build fat reserves prior to winter. These fields would also attract animals onto WMA public lands, to better provide hunting/viewing opportunities and where wildlife are more readily tolerated. Using a local lessee is a cost-effective approach to management, supports local producers, and fosters neighborly relationships.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

Physical Environment. At the bottom of this “Land Resources” checklist, provide a narrative description and evaluation of the cumulative and secondary effects on land resources. Even if you checked “none” in the above table, explain how you came to that conclusion. Consider the immediate, short-term effects of the action as well as the long-term effects. Attach additional pages of narrative if needed.

| <u>1. LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in: | Impact | | | | Can Impact be Mitigated | Comment Index |
|--|----------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | | |
| a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure? | | X | | | | |
| b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil, which would reduce productivity or fertility? | | | X | | Yes | 1b |
| c. Destruction, covering, or modification of any unique geologic or physical features? | | X | | | | |
| d. Changes in situation, deposition, or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream of the bed or shore of a lake? | | X | | | | |
| e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard? | | X | | | | |
| f. Other: | | X | | | | |

1b. Some soil compaction may occur with equipment use during fertilizing, spraying, mowing, and haying.

Physical Environment. At the bottom of this “Air” checklist, provide a narrative description and evaluation of the cumulative and secondary effects on air resources. Even if you checked “none” in the above table, explain how you came to that conclusion. Consider the immediate, short-term effects of the action as well as the long-term effects. Attach additional pages of narrative if needed.

| 2. AIR Will the proposed action result in: | Impact | | | | Can Impact be Mitigated | Comment Index |
|---|----------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | | |
| a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (also see 13c) | | | X | | Yes | 2a |
| b. Creation of objectionable odors? | | X | | | | |
| c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any changes in climate, either locally or regionally? | | X | | | | |
| d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants? | | X | | | | |
| e. <u>For P-R/D-J projects:</u> Any discharge that will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (also see 2a) | | X | | | | |
| f. Other: | | X | | | | |

2a. Some emissions would occur due to vehicle/equipment exhaust during haying activities (fertilizing, spraying, mowing, haying). These would be short-term and temporary. All steps to ensure quick and thorough haying would be taken to minimize prolonged effects on localized air quality.

Physical Environment. At the bottom of this “Water” checklist, provide a narrative description and evaluation of the cumulative and secondary effects on water resources. Even if you checked “none” in the above table, explain how you came to that conclusion. Consider the immediate, short-term effects of the action as well as the long-term effects. Attach additional pages of narrative if needed.

| 3. WATER Will the proposed action result in: | Impact | | | | Can Impact be Mitigated | Comment Index |
|--|----------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | | |
| a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen, or turbidity? | | X | | | | |
| b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff? | | X | | | | |
| c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows? | | X | | | | |
| d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body? | | X | | | | |
| e. Exposure of people or property to water-related hazards such as flooding? | | X | | | | |
| f. Changes in the quality of groundwater? | | X | | | | |
| g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater? | | X | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|----|
| h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater? | | X | | | | |
| i. Effects on any existing water rights or reservation? | | X | | | | 3i |
| j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality? | | X | | | | |
| k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity? | | X | | | | |
| l. Effects to a designated floodplain? | | X | | | | |
| m. Any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? | | X | | | | |
| n. Other: | | X | | | | |

3i. Irrigation of hay fields would occur within prescribed limits and scope of existing MFWP-held water rights for the WMA; hayfields are currently in place and managed as irrigated cropland.

Physical Environment. At the bottom of this “Vegetation” checklist, provide a narrative description and evaluation of the cumulative and secondary effects on vegetative resources. Even if you checked “none” in the above table, explain how you came to that conclusion. Consider the immediate, short-term effects of the action as well as the long-term effects. Attach additional pages of narrative if needed.

| 4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in: | Impact | | | | Can Impact be Mitigated | Comment Index |
|---|---------|------|-------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | | |
| a. Changes in the diversity, productivity, or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)? | | | | X | | 4a |
| b. Alteration of a plant community? | | X | | | | |
| c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species? | | X | | | | |
| d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land? | | X | | | | |
| e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds? | | X | | | | 4e |
| f. Effects to wetlands or prime and unique farmland? | | X | | | | |
| g. Other: | | X | | | | |

4a. Annual irrigation and reinvigoration of the hay fields via farming wheat and re-planting alfalfa in years 3 and 4 would result in increased productivity and abundance of vegetation in those fields.

4e. Annual spraying of noxious weeds would occur on the hayfields to prevent their establishment and spread.

Physical Environment. At the bottom of this “Fish/Wildlife” checklist, provide a narrative description and evaluation of the cumulative and secondary effects on fish and wildlife resources. Even if you checked “none” in the above table, explain how you came to that conclusion. Consider the immediate, short-term effects of the action as well as the long-term effects. Attach additional pages of narrative if needed.

| 5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in: | Impact | | | | Can Impact be Mitigated | Comment Index |
|---|----------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | | |
| a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat? | | X | | | | 5a |
| b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species? | | | | X | | 5b |
| c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species? | | | | X | | 5c |
| d. Introduction of a new species into an area? | | X | | | | |
| e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals? | | X | | | | |
| f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species? | | X | | | | |
| g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)? | | | X | | | 5g |
| h. Adverse effects to threatened/endangered species or their habitat? | | X | | | | |
| i. Introduction or exportation of any species not presently or historically occurring in the affected location? | | X | | | | |
| j. Other: | | X | | | | |

5a. Throughout the growing season, continual irrigation would enhance the productivity of alfalfa in these hay fields. There would be short-term disturbance and loss of cover the 1st cutting of hay. Irrigation afterwards would reinvigorate the vegetation and result in green, productive forage for wildlife, especially going into fall.

5b. Irrigation and haying activities would increase vigor and productivity of the hayfields, creating habitat and a forage base for game and bird species in the fall.

5c. Irrigation and haying activities would increase vigor and productivity of the hayfields, creating habitat and a forage base for nongame species.

5g. Haying activities may temporarily displace some wildlife, but the surrounding uplands and riparian area within the WMA provide necessary habitat while those activities are completed.

Human Environment. At the bottom of this “Noise/Electrical Effects” checklist, provide a narrative description and evaluation of the cumulative and secondary effects of noise and electrical activities. Even if you checked “none” in the above table, explain how you came to that conclusion. Consider the immediate, short-term effects of the action as well as the long-term effects. Attach additional pages of narrative if needed.

| 6. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS Will the proposed action result in: | Impact | | | | Can Impact be Mitigated | Comment Index |
|--|----------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | | |
| a. Increases in existing noise levels? | | | X | | | 6a |
| b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels? | | X | | | | |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|--|--|
| c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property? | | X | | | | |
| d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation? | | X | | | | |
| e. Other: | | X | | | | |

6a. Some additional noise would occur due to vehicles/equipment running during haying activities (fertilizing, spraying, mowing, haying). These would be short-term and temporary. All steps to ensure quick and thorough haying would be taken to minimize prolonged effects on localized noise levels.

Human Environment. At the bottom of this “Land Use” checklist, provide a narrative description and evaluation of the cumulative and secondary effects on land use. Even if you checked “none” in the above table, explain how you came to that conclusion. Consider the immediate, short-term effects of the action as well as the long-term effects. Attach additional pages of narrative if needed.

| <u>7. LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in: | Impact | | | | Can Impact be Mitigated | Comment Index |
|--|----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | | |
| a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area? | | X | | | | |
| b. A conflict with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance? | | X | | | | |
| c. A conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action? | | | X | | Yes | 7c |
| d. Adverse effects on, or relocation of, residences? | | X | | | | |
| e. Compliance with existing land policies for land use, transportation, and open space? | | X | | | | |
| f. Increased traffic hazards, traffic volume, or speed limits, or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods? | | X | | | | |
| g. Other: | | X | | | | |

7c. The Beckman WMA is open to public recreational use during the haying period, thus members of the public may be temporarily displaced from the hayfields during these activities. However, public use of the Beckman WMA, and the hayfields in particular, is low during that time of year. All steps would be taken to conduct a quick and thorough haying to minimize the amount of time the fields would be closed to the public.

Human Environment. At the bottom of this “Risk/Health Hazards” checklist, provide a narrative description and evaluation of the cumulative and secondary effects of risks and health hazards. Even if you checked “none” in the above table, explain how you came to that conclusion. Consider the immediate, short-term effects of the action as well as the long-term effects. Attach additional pages of narrative if needed.

| 8. RISKS/HEALTH HAZARDS Will the proposed action result in: | Impact | | | | Can Impact be Mitigated | Comment Index |
|--|---------|------|-------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | | |
| a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other form of disruption? | | | X | | Yes | 8a |
| b. Effects on existing emergency responses or emergency evacuation plan or create need for a new plan? | | X | | | | |
| c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard? | | X | | | | |
| d. Disturbance to any sites with known or potential deposits of hazardous materials? | | X | | | | |
| e. The use of any chemical toxicants? | | X | | | | |
| f. Other: | | X | | | | |

8a. Haying activities utilize farm machinery, and such activities may lead to a small amount of diesel and gasoline being released during refueling. All precautionary measures would be taken to minimize any spills or leaks. Most refueling would likely occur off-site of the Beckman WMA.

Human Environment. At the bottom of this “Community Impact” checklist, provide a narrative description and evaluation of the cumulative and secondary effects on the community. Even if you checked “none” in the above table, explain how you came to that conclusion. Consider the immediate, short-term effects of the action as well as the long-term effects. Attach additional pages of narrative if needed.

| 9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in: | Impact | | | | Can Impact be Mitigated | Comment Index |
|---|---------|------|-------|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | | |
| a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area? | | X | | | | |
| b. Alteration of the social structure of a community? | | X | | | | |
| c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income? | | | X | | | 9c |
| d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity? | | X | | | | |
| e. Increase traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods? | | X | | | | |
| f. Other: | | X | | | | |

9c. This no cash lease provides wildlife habitat on the WMA while improving landowner/neighbor relationships in the area. Using a local lessee enhances MFWP’s good neighbor policy, provides hay base for the lessee and improves wildlife habitat on a publicly-owned WMA.

Human Environment. At the bottom of this “Public Services/Taxes/Utilities” checklist, provide a narrative description and evaluation of the cumulative and secondary effects on public services, taxes, and utilities. Even if you checked “none” in the above table, explain how you came to that conclusion. Consider the immediate, short-term effects of the action as well as the long-term effects. Attach additional pages of narrative if needed.

| <u>10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in: | Impact | | | | Can Impact be Mitigated | Comment Index |
|--|----------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | | |
| a. An effect upon, or result in a need for new or altered, governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If so, specify: | | X | | | | |
| b. Effects on the local or state tax base and revenues? | | X | | | | |
| c. A need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications? | | X | | | | |
| d. Increased use of any energy source? | | X | | | | |
| e. Other: | | X | | | | |
| Additional information requested: | | | | | | |
| f. Define projected revenue sources. | | | | | | |
| g. Define projected maintenance costs. | | | | | | |

Human Environment. At the bottom of this “Aesthetics/Recreation” checklist, provide a narrative description and evaluation of the cumulative and secondary effects on aesthetics and recreation. Even if you checked “none” in the above table, explain how you came to that conclusion. Consider the immediate, short-term effects of the action as well as the long-term effects. Attach additional pages of narrative if needed.

| <u>11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION</u> Will the proposed action result in: | Impact | | | | Can Impact be Mitigated | Comment Index |
|---|----------------|-------------|--------------|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | | |
| a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view? | | | X | | | 11a |
| b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood? | | | X | | | 11b |
| c. Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report) | | X | | | | |
| d. Adverse effects to any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails, or wilderness areas? | | X | | | | |
| e. Other: | | X | | | | |

11a/b. The cut hay fields may be visually unappealing immediately after cutting, however with irrigation the stands would grow in and again be uniform. Additionally, green, irrigated fields may be more visually appealing to some than dried, decadent stands.

Human Environment. At the bottom of this “Cultural/Historical Resources” checklist, provide a narrative description and evaluation of the cumulative and secondary effects on cultural/historical resources. Even if you checked “none” in the above table, explain how you came to that conclusion. Consider the immediate, short-term effects of the action as well as the long-term effects. Attach additional pages of narrative if needed.

| 12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in: | Impact | | | | Can Impact be Mitigated | Comment Index |
|---|----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | | |
| a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure, or object of prehistoric, historic, or archeological importance? | | X | | | | |
| b. Physical changes that would affect unique cultural values? | | X | | | | |
| c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area? | | X | | | | |
| d. Adverse effects to historic or cultural resources? | | X | | | | |
| e. Other: | | X | | | | |

Human Environment. At the bottom of this “Summary Evaluation of Significance” checklist, provide a narrative description and evaluation of the cumulative and secondary effects. Even if you checked “none” in the above table, explain how you came to that conclusion. Consider the immediate, short-term effects of the action as well as the long-term effects. Attach additional pages of narrative if needed.

| 13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action result in: | Impact | | | | Can Impact be Mitigated | Comment Index |
|--|----------------|-------------|--------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|
| | Unknown | None | Minor | Potentially Significant | | |
| a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources which create a significant effect when considered together or in total.) | | X | | | | |
| b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur? | | X | | | | |
| c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard, or formal plan? | | X | | | | |
| d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed? | | X | | | | |
| e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created? | | X | | | | |
| f. Have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? | | X | | | | |

| | |
|--|--|
| Additional information requested: | |
| g. List any federal or state permits required. | |

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

- The lessee will provide fertilizer, herbicides/pesticides, winter wheat seed, and alfalfa/grass-mix seed for essential cover crop production, hay field reinvigoration, and maintenance. The lessee will also provide equipment, labor, and fuel costs. MFWP will pay for the electricity associated with running the irrigation pumps.
- On an as-needed basis, the lessee will apply fertilizer on both agricultural fields.
- In May of all years and in September of all years except 2022 or 2023 (when renovation will likely be required), the lessee will apply appropriate non-residual herbicides to control annual and perennial weeds. In August 2022 or 2023, the lessee will spray out the existing field in preparation for seeding of winter wheat, those additional spraying in September is not necessary. In June of all years except 2023 or 2024 (when winter wheat will be harvested), the lessee will administer pesticides to control weevils if necessary.
- Use the water and existing sprinkler systems, owned and controlled by MFWP, on the two above-described hay fields for producing alfalfa hay, winter wheat, and a grass alfalfa mix. Up to two cuttings of hay will be permitted per year, while a third or final “cutting” will be produced and left standing for wildlife.
- No application of herbicides/pesticides from an aircraft will be permitted.
- Remove hay bales prior to August 15 and irrigation equipment from fields prior to September 15 annually (irrigation equipment stored on-site).
- By December 31 each year, provide a record of condition of both fields with a minimum of 5 images per field and a narrative that describes the work accomplished during the irrigation season, hay harvested (number and type of bales), and the results of follow-up irrigation.

PART III. ENVIRONMENTAL CHECKLIST CONCLUSION SECTION

1. **Discuss the cumulative and secondary effects of this project as a whole. These are impacts to the human environment that, individually, may be minor for a specific project, but, when considered in combination to other actions, may result in significant impacts.** None are expected.
2. **Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this Environmental Checklist (Part II), is an EIS required?** No.
If an EIS is not required, explain why the current checklist of review is appropriate.
An EIS is not deemed necessary for the proposed action. An EA is the appropriate level of analysis given the overall size and scope of the project. In addition, overall negative impacts are expected to be minimal, at most.

3. Public Input Summary

- Public notification of the draft EA and opportunities to comment will be provided via:
- Public notice in the local paper: Lewistown News-Argus
- Direct mailing to adjacent landowners and interested parties
- Public notice on the MFWP webpage: News → Recent Public Notices → Environmental Assessments
- An email to elected officials, governmental agencies, and interested publics

Copies of this EA will also be available for public review at MFWP Region 4 Headquarters in Great Falls, the MFWP Area Resource Office in Lewistown, and by emailing sandersen@mt.gov.

The public comment period will extend for 21 days beginning Tuesday, March 2. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 pm, March 23 and can be mailed or e-mailed to the addresses below. After public comment is received and reviewed, a Decision Notice will be provided to the public and a recommendation to the Fish & Wildlife Commission for their ultimate approval at their regularly scheduled meeting April 1, 2021.

Beckman WMA Agricultural Lease c/o Sonja Andersen
Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks
Lewistown-area Office
333 Airport Rd
Lewistown, MT 59457

Or e-mail comments to: sandersen@mt.gov

