

**Draft  
Environmental Assessment**

**Bad Rock Canyon Wildlife Management Area  
Proposed Hunter Access and Youth Hunting  
Opportunity**



**June 10, 2022**



***Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks***

# Draft Environmental Assessment

## MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST

### PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

**1. Type of proposed state action:**

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to manage hunter access at the recently acquired Bad Rock Canyon Wildlife Management Area (WMA) through a lottery and reservation system that would limit hunter numbers and provide youth preference, creating a quality youth hunting opportunity along the Flathead River near Columbia Falls.

**2. Agency authority for the proposed action:**

Hunting on WMAs is regulated by the Fish and Wildlife Commission Rules for Public Use of Montana's Wildlife Management Areas. Under Rule 2. Hunting & Trapping Seasons, WMAs are open to all Commission established Hunting seasons unless closed under Rule 1 (Winter Closure) or specifically closed or restricted as noted in Hunting Regulations. In addition, the Commission authorizes the Department to issue WMA specific restrictions.

**4. Anticipated Schedule:**

Public Comment Period: June 10 – June 27, 2022

Decision Notice: July 5, 2022

**5. Location affected by proposed action:**

Bad Rock Canyon Wildlife Management Area: Flathead County, Montana: portions of Sections 9, 10, 11 and 16 in Township 30N, Range 20W.

**6. Project size -- estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:**

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>0</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
(b) Open Space/	<u>557</u>	Dry cropland	<u>0</u>
Woodlands/Recreation		Forestry	<u>0</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian	<u>215</u>	Rangeland	<u>0</u>
Areas		Other	<u>0</u>

**7. Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.**

None

In December 2021, Montana FWP acquired the 772-acre Bad Rock Canyon WMA along the Flathead River on the outskirts of the city of Columbia Falls (Map 1). During the acquisition process, FWP committed to develop a proposal for how it would administer hunting opportunity on the WMA and vet it through the public review process. Under the previous ownership, the property was enrolled in FWP's Block Management Program and provided limited opportunity for apprentice and youth hunters to harvest white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, black bear, upland game birds and turkey during the archery and general big game seasons. Given the relatively small acreage of the area and to provide for a quality hunt, the property was open Thursday – Sunday with permission required through reservation, first come, first served, during the archery season and by lottery during the general hunting season. Access was for a single party, for a single day.

**Map 1: Bad Rock Canyon WMA (772 acres)**

This aerial map shows the Bad Rock Canyon Wildlife Management Area (WMA) boundary, outlined in orange. The WMA is situated along the Snake River, which flows from the top left towards the bottom right. To the west of the river is the city of Columbia Falls, with streets such as 4th St W, 5th St W, 6th St W, 7th St W, 8th St W, 9th St W, 10th St W, 11th St W, 12th St W, 13th St W, 14th St W, 15th St W, 16th St W, 17th St W, 18th St W, 19th St W, 20th St W, 21st St W, 22nd St W, 23rd St W, 24th St W, 25th St W, 26th St W, 27th St W, 28th St W, 29th St W, 30th St W, 31st St W, 32nd St W, 33rd St W, 34th St W, 35th St W, 36th St W, 37th St W, 38th St W, 39th St W, 40th St W, 41st St W, 42nd St W, 43rd St W, 44th St W, 45th St W, 46th St W, 47th St W, 48th St W, 49th St W, 50th St W, 51st St W, 52nd St W, 53rd St W, 54th St W, 55th St W, 56th St W, 57th St W, 58th St W, 59th St W, 60th St W, 61st St W, 62nd St W, 63rd St W, 64th St W, 65th St W, 66th St W, 67th St W, 68th St W, 69th St W, 70th St W, 71st St W, 72nd St W, 73rd St W, 74th St W, 75th St W, 76th St W, 77th St W, 78th St W, 79th St W, 80th St W, 81st St W, 82nd St W, 83rd St W, 84th St W, 85th St W, 86th St W, 87th St W, 88th 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Recognizing the public's desire to maintain a youth-hunting option, while also broadening the limited entry opportunity to give all interested parties an opportunity to hunt the WMA, FWP proposes to manage hunting on Bad Rock Canyon WMA as follows:

Bad Rock Canyon WMA will be open to hunting during the fall Deer & Elk Archery and General Seasons, as well as the portion of Spring Turkey and Black Bear Seasons falling outside the WMA's Big Game winter closure (11:59 PM December 1 – Noon May 15). During these periods, hunting will be permitted with the following conditions:

- 1) Archery Season: Access will be granted by lottery drawing and awarded to up to two individuals / week, with access awarded for a one-week period. No youth preference.
- 2) General Season: The property will be open to hunting Thursday – Sunday, and Monday holidays. Access will be awarded through random lottery draw with 50% of days reserved for apprentice and youth hunters. Access will be granted for a single day and for a single party of no more than three (3).
- 3) Huntible Species: All species that are “in-season” can be harvested.
- 4) Spring Turkey and Black Bear: The WMA will be open from noon, May 15<sup>th</sup> to season close; by random lottery. Access will be awarded to a single party of no more than three (3), and access will be granted for a period of two consecutive days. No youth preference.
- 5) WMA Recreational access (including fishing) is open to the general public from noon May 15<sup>th</sup> to the start of the youth hunt opener in late October.

## **9. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:**

### **Alternative A: No Action**

Under the No Action Alternative, hunting will be regulated by the Fish and Wildlife Commission Rules for Public Use of Montana's Wildlife Management Areas. Under the rule, the Bad Rock Canyon WMA would be open to hunting by the general public during all Commission established hunting seasons, except during the big game winter closure from December 1 at 11:59 PM until May 15 at noon each year.

Under the No Action Alternative, the property would be open to hunting during all Commission established hunting seasons; there would be no youth preference and hunter density would be limited by individual discretion; the property could be hunted seven-days per week and persistent hunting pressure could displace game during the hunting season.

### **Alternative B: Proposed Action**

Under the Proposed Action, FWP will manage for a limited opportunity hunt with youth preference as follows:

Bad Rock Canyon WMA will be open to hunting during the fall Deer & Elk Archery and General Seasons, as well as the portion of Spring Turkey and Black Bear Seasons falling

outside the WMA's Big Game winter closure (11:59 PM December 1 – Noon May 15). During these periods, hunting will be permitted with the following conditions:

- 1) Archery Season: Access will be granted by lottery drawing and awarded to up to two individuals / week, with access awarded for a one-week period. No youth preference.
- 2) General Season: The property will be open to hunting Thursday – Sunday, and Monday holidays. Access will be awarded through random lottery draw with 50% of days reserved for apprentice and youth hunters. Access will be granted for a single day and for a single party of no more than three (3).
- 3) Huntible Species: All species that are “in-season” can be harvested.
- 4) Spring Turkey and Black Bear: The WMA will be open from noon, May 15<sup>th</sup> to season close; by random lottery. Access will be awarded to a single party of no more than three hunters, and access will be granted for a period of two consecutive days. No youth preference.
- 5) WMA Recreational access (including fishing) is open to the general public from noon May 15<sup>th</sup> to the start of the youth hunt opener in late October.

Under the Proposed Action, both youth and general hunting opportunities will be provided; hunter number and days would be limited to provide quality hunt experience, reduce crowding issues, and limit game displacement.

**Alternative C: Youth Only Opportunity Status Quo**

Under Alternative C, hunting at Bad Rock Canyon WMA would be managed as a youth-only opportunity, following rules established when the property was enrolled in the Block Management Program. Under Alternative C, FWP would manage hunting as follows:

- 1) Bad Rock Canyon WMA will only be open to apprentice and youth hunters ages 10-15.
- 2) Advanced permission is required.
- 3) Reservations for hunting during Spring Turkey and Black Bear Season will be issued first-come, first-served by visiting or calling FWP Region 1 Main Office in Kalispell beginning the third Tuesday of April. Each party may reserve 2 consecutive days at a time and may not make further reservations until their hunt date is complete.
- 4) Reservations for hunting during Archery Season will be issued first-come, first-served by visiting or calling FWP Region 1 Main Office in Kalispell, beginning the third Tuesday of August. Each party may reserve 1 day at a time and may not make further reservations until their hunt date is complete.
- 5) Reservations for hunting during the General Rifle and 2-day Youth Deer Hunt will be issued by random lottery of applications completed during the month of September.
- 6) Hunting is limited to one party per day of not more than three people.

Under Alternative C, hunting opportunity would be limited to apprentice and youth

hunters exclusively; and hunter number and density would be limited.

## **PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST**

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

### **A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

1. <b><u>LAND RESOURCES</u></b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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				
c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				

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

3. <b><u>WATER</u></b>  Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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 right or reservation?		X				
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. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c.)		X				
m. For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		X				

4. <u>VEGETATION</u>  Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		X				
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				
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:		X				



5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				c
d. Introduction of 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				g.
h. For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f.)		X				
i. For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d.)		X				

c. Seasonal changes in wildlife abundance on the property could occur. The Proposed Action would decrease hunter density and limit hunting pressure resulting in changes in wildlife distribution.

g. The Proposed Action would decrease hunter density and hunter days relative to that permitted by Commission Rules for WMAs, reducing wildlife impacts including legal harvest of game animals.

## B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
b. Exposure of people to serve 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				

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				

8. <b><u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u></b>  Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan, or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		X				

9. <b><u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u></b>  Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have 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 any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in 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. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. Define projected revenue sources		X				
f. Define projected maintenance costs.		X				

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

c. When the property was private, hunting opportunity was administered by the Block Management Program and was a youth-only opportunity. The Proposed Alternative would increase hunter days and extend opportunity to all interested parties, while still preserving a youth-specific opportunity.

12. <b><u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u></b>  Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		x				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		x				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		x				
d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a.)		x				

## SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u>  Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that 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. For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		x				
g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		x				



### **PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT**

This analysis did not reveal any significant impacts to the human or physical environment. Under the Fish and Wildlife Commission Rules for public use of Montana's WMAs, WMAs are open to all Commission established hunting seasons unless specifically closed or restricted. This proposal recognizes the strong public sentiment for maintaining a youth-only hunting opportunity at Bad Rock Canyon WMA, while also accommodating hunting opportunity for the general public.

### **PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

#### **1. Public involvement:**

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: Flathead Beacon, Daily Inter Lake, The Hungry Horse News, and Helena Independent Record;
- Direct mailing to adjoining landowners, interested parties, and those who provided input during acquisition;
- One statewide press release,
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <https://fwp.mt.gov/news/public-notices>.

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope having limited impacts, many of which can be mitigated.

#### **2. Duration of comment period:**

The public comment period will extend for (18) eighteen days. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., Monday June 27, 2022 and can be mailed or emailed to the addresses below:

Stevie Burton  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
490 North Meridian Rd  
Kalispell, MT 59901

Or email: [stevie.burton@mt.gov](mailto:stevie.burton@mt.gov)

## **PART V. EA PREPARATION**

- 1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? (YES/NO)? No**

**If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.**

Based upon the above assessment, which has identified a limited number of minor impacts from the Proposed Action, an EIS is not required and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of review

- 2. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**

Franz Ingelfinger, Kalispell Area Wildlife Biologist  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
490 North Meridian Rd.  
Kalispell, MT 59901  
(406) 751-4580

- 3. List of agencies or offices consulted during preparation of the EA:**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

**APPENDIX A**  
23-1-110 MCA  
PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

**Date:**

**Person Reviewing:**

**Project Location:**

**Description of Proposed Work:**

The following checklist is intended to be a guide for determining whether a proposed development or improvement is of enough significance to fall under 23-1-110 rules. (Please check ☐ all that apply and comment as necessary.)

- [ ] A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?  
Comments:
- [ ] B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?  
Comments:
- [ ] C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?  
Comments:
- [ ] D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?  
Comments:
- [ ] E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a doublewide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?  
Comments:
- [ ] F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?  
Comments:
- [ ] G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?  
Comments:

- ☐ H. Any new above ground utility lines?  
Comments:
- ☐ I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?  
Comments:
- ☐ J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?  
Comments:

If any of the above are checked, 23-1-110 MCA rules apply to this proposed work and should be documented on the MEPA/HB495 CHECKLIST. Refer to MEPA/HB495 Cross Reference Summary for further assistance.