



# MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

**Region 1  
490 N. Meridian Road  
Kalispell, MT 59901**

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

**July 5, 2022**

**Description of the Proposed Action**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) proposes to manage hunter access at the recently acquired Bad Rock Canyon Wildlife Management Area (WMA) through a lottery and reservation system that would provide for general opportunity during the archery season and a youth opportunity during the general season. Hunting access would be structured to limit the number of days each week that the WMA is open to hunting, thus creating a safe and quality youth hunting opportunity along the Flathead River near Columbia Falls.

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 and Trapping Seasons, WMAs are open to all Commission established hunting seasons unless closed under Rule 1 (Winter Closures) or specifically closed or restricted as noted in Hunting Regulations. Bad Rock Canyon WMA would be managed under Rule 1 and closed for all recreation during the winter (December 1 – May 15).

**Public Involvement**

The Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed action was released for an 18-day public comment period on June 10, 2022. The public was notified in the following manner: MFWP ran legal ads in the *Helena Independent Record*, *Flathead Beacon*, *Daily Inter Lake*, and *Hungry Horse News* describing the proposed project and the availability of the draft EA; the draft EA was posted on MFWP's official web site; direct mailings were sent to adjoining landowners, interested parties, and those who provided input during the WMA's acquisition. MFWP also issued a press release that described the project, availability of the draft EA, and the public comment timeline.

**Summary of Public Comments and MFWP Response**

MFWP Received 37 public comments on the proposed action. Comments fell into one of three categories: Opposition to any hunting on the grounds of concern for wildlife and public safety; support for the preferred alternative which would create a system to limit hunter numbers and provide a 50% youth-preference; and comments in support of making the WMA a youth-only hunting opportunity. All

comments, in their original form, are included in Appendix A of this Decision Notice. The following is a summary of questions and issues raised by commenters and FWP's responses.

- six comments were received that expressed opposition to any hunting on the Bad Rock Canyon WMA on the grounds that wildlife need a sanctuary from hunting and / or that hunting created a public safety issue due to recreational uses on the property and development within the surrounding area.

**FWP Response:** Funding for the acquisition of the Bad Rock Canyon WMA was provided, in part, by sportsman's dollars and revenue generated from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses. During the acquisition process, it was explicit that the property was being purchased as a Wildlife Management Area with hunting and hunter access one among many reasons for the WMAs creation. As a WMA, the property is, by law, open to hunting. The focus of this proposal and EA is not whether to permit hunting on the WMA, but rather how MFWP will manage hunting and hunter access.

Regarding public safety, the proposed action includes several safeguards, including closing the property to public recreation for the duration of the general hunting season and limiting the numbers of hunters permitted on the property at any one time. Largely a wooded property located within the floodplain of the Flathead River, the WMA shares similar housing distances and densities to that of numerous other publicly huntable lands throughout the region. Creating a Weapons Restriction Area within the Bad Rock Canyon WMA is currently unwarranted.

- Four comments were received in support of expanding the proposed youth-only opportunity to include hunters with disabilities.

**FWP Response:** FWP appreciates the suggestion and will expand the youth-only opportunity to also include hunters that have disabilities as evidenced by possession of a Permit to Hunt from a Vehicle (PTHFV). Although there is little to no opportunity to hunt the WMA directly from a vehicle, it would be a suitable hunt for qualifying hunters with the ability to hunt independent of a vehicle.

- Two comments were received in support of limiting hunting opportunity to youth only but without restricting hunter numbers through a limited permit system.

**FWP Response:** Given the WMA's small size, FWP believes that persistent and unlimited hunting pressure would displace game during the hunting season, to the detriment of the hunting experience and contribute to game damage issues on surrounding private property.

- Thirty-one comments were received in support of the proposal to manage hunting on the WMA. Of those, eight were in favor of Alternative B in which would manage hunter numbers with a limited permit system and 50% reserve for youth ages 10-15. The remaining twenty-three comments were

in support of Alternative C in which hunting opportunity would be reserved exclusively for youth ages 10 – 15.

**FWP Response:** FWP appreciates comments in support of managing hunting opportunity at Bad Rock Canyon WMA through a limited permit system and youth preference. FWP also recognizes the strong sentiment that the opportunity should be exclusively for youth. To balance that sentiment with the need to provide access to all hunters, FWP recommends a hunting season structure for Bad Rock Canyon WMA in which Archery Season opportunity is open to all, while General Rifle and Spring Turkey Seasons would be exclusively for youth ages 10-15 and disabled hunters with a PTHFV. Both seasons would be managed under a limited access permit.

- No comments were received in support of Alternative A, the No Action Alternative in which hunting on the Bad Rock Canyon WMA would be open to all Fish and Wildlife Commission established hunting seasons without limitations on hunter number.

#### **MFWP Recommended Alternative and Final Decision**

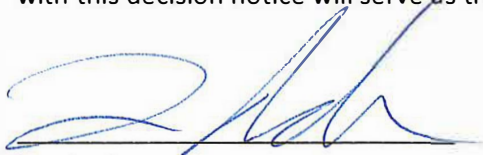
In reviewing all the public comment and other relevant information, and evaluating the environmental effects, I recommend that Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission approve the following hunting season structure for the Bad Rock Canyon WMA:

Hunting on the Bad Rock Canyon WMA by written permission through limited access permit only. Archery season – open to archery equipment only, for all legal species. General Season and Spring Turkey – limited to youth ages 10-15 and hunters with a PTHFV, for all legal species. Closed to spring black bear hunting. Hunters must apply for an opportunity to access the WMA via a random drawing. During archery season, permits will be for 1-week duration, with up to two permits awarded per week; all hunters are eligible to apply. During the General Rifle and Spring Turkey Seasons, permits will be for a single day, awarded to a single party, and limited to youth ages 10-15 and hunters in possession of a PTHFV. In addition, during the Archery, Youth Only, and General Rifle Seasons, the WMA will be open to hunting Thursday – Sunday and Monday holidays and closed all other days. The WMA will be closed to recreation for the duration of the General Rifle Season, starting on the first day of the Youth Only Season.

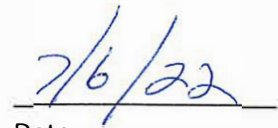
The hunting season structure above affords a majority opportunity to youth and disabled hunters, while providing general hunter access during the archery season. In addition, periods of rest are provided during the Archery and General Rifle Seasons to limit displacement of game and protect the quality of the hunt experience. Providing for youth-only opportunity and a quality hunting experience supports recruitment efforts for new hunters. Finally, in deference to public safety, the property will be closed to Spring Bear hunting to eliminate overlap between recreational uses and periods when the property is open to hunting with high-powered rifles.

Through the public review process described above, the public raised some issues / concerns with the project, but all have been addressed in this decision document. FWP found no significant impacts on the human or physical environments associated with this proposal. Therefore, the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and an environmental impact statement is not required.

Noting and including the responses to public comments, the draft EA will become the final EA and together with this decision notice will serve as the final documents for this proposal

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lee Anderson', written over a horizontal line.

Lee Anderson  
Regional supervisor

A handwritten date '7/6/22' in blue ink, written over a horizontal line.

Date