



MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

Draft Environmental Assessment

Fence replacement to improve wildlife movement in grassland habitat

July 8, 2022

Draft Environmental Assessment CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. **Type of proposed state action:**
Proposed work will target fencing that impedes wildlife movement for removal and replacement with wildlife friendly fence. Woven wire and other fencing types can be a barrier for pronghorn and other wildlife as they move throughout the environment. Removing it will improve landscape connectivity and replacing it with wildlife friendly fencing will allow ranchers to continue their operations without impeding wildlife movement.
2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:** The Montana Legislature enacted statute 87-1-201, which provides authority for the Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks to protect, enhance, and regulate the use of Montana's fish and wildlife resources and to manage those species in a manner that prevents the need for federal listing, all for public benefit now and in the future.
3. **Name of project:** Fence replacement to improve wildlife movement in grassland habitat.

4. Name, address and phone number of project sponsor (if other than the agency)

5. Anticipated Schedule:

- July 8 – July 22, 2022: Public comment period
- July 29th, 2022: Decision Notice completed
- August 1 – August 15: 15-day application period. Use targeted outreach and advertising to encourage applications from landowners interested in replacing fencing that impedes animal movement with wildlife friendly fencing.
- August – September 2022: rank applications, make initial funding determinations, due diligence, and draft contracts.

6. Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township – included map):

This work will take place on public and private lands in Rosebud County.

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

Based on the available funding we anticipate replacing up to 45 miles of fence. We expect each mile of fence to improve wildlife movement for at least one square section on each side of the fence (1,280 acres per 1 mile of fence). At 45 miles of fence replaced we would potentially affect 57,600 acres of rangeland.

8. Permits, Funding & Overlapping Jurisdiction.

(a) Permits: No permits needed.

(b) Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Maximum Funding Amount</u>
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	\$100,000
State special revenue fund established in 87-1-601	\$50,000
Nongame wildlife account established in 87-5-121	\$50,000

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
N/A	

9. Narrative summary of the proposed action:

Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks received a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to improve landscape permeability for pronghorn and other wildlife. Rosebud county landowners have voiced concerns over the inability of pronghorn to move across their lands. Recent telemetry data from collared pronghorn confirms that fencing is a barrier – in some areas point location data ends abruptly along a fence line. FWP proposes to purchase wildlife friendly fencing materials and award them to private landowners interested in replacing woven wire, and other types of fencing that impede wildlife movement. Fencing on State Trust lands may also be targeted for removal to improve movement in areas with public access. FWP will use targeted outreach and advertising to solicit applications from landowners in Rosebud County. Interested landowners will submit applications that specify the type of fencing to be replaced, how much new fencing material is required, and when the installation would take place. The landowner would be responsible for removing the old and installing the new fencing.

10. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not purchase or provide wildlife friendly fencing materials to qualifying landowners. FWP would return \$100,000 to NFWF.

Alternative B: Proposed Action

FWP would purchase wildlife friendly fencing materials, accept applications from landowners interested in replacing existing fencing, and award contracts to qualified applicants.

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

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality				X		
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
6. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		
7. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species				X		
8. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
9. Changes to abundance or movement of species		X positive				A.9

A.9. Replacing woven wire and other types of fencing with wildlife friendly fencing is expected to increase animal movement across the landscape. The new fencing will also be safer for wildlife by increasing the permeability of the fences and therefore reducing the potential for animals to become entangled, injured, or die while attempting to pass through the fence.

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects				X		
2. Land use				X		
3. Risk and/or health hazards				X		
4. Community impact				X		
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				X		
7. Aesthetics and recreation	X					B.7
8. Cultural and historic resources				X		
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

B.7 Wildlife friendly fencing will be installed where existing fencing has been removed, so we do not expect any change in aesthetics or recreation.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The proposed action would provide materials to replace woven wire, and other types of fencing that impede wildlife movement, on public and private lands. Landowners would be required to remove existing fencing and replace with wildlife friendly fencing, so the action will occur on acres already impacted by fences. In consideration of potential impacts to both the physical and human environments, FWP does not find substantial or significant negative impacts that might result from the proposed action. In fact, we anticipate that new, wildlife friendly fencing will improve the safe movement of pronghorn and other wildlife across the landscape.

1. Public involvement:

The public will be notified in the following manners to comment on this Environmental Assessment, the Proposed Action and No Action alternatives:

- One statewide press release
- One public notice in the *Miles City Star* and the *Forsyth Independent Press*
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>

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 15 days. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 pm, July 22, 2022 and can be submitted via electronic and physical address below:

Email: Brett.Dorak@mt.gov

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks,
c/o Brett Dorak
PO Box 1630
Miles City, MT 59301

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 on an evaluation of the proposed work's impacts to the physical and human environment, under MEPA, the proposed action is not a significant action affecting the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not a necessary level of review.

- 2. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:**
Kristina Smucker, Nongame Wildlife Bureau Chief
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
1420 E. Sixth Ave
Helena, MT 59602
406-444-5209

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

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks – Wildlife Division
Legal Bureau