

# **Decision Notice**

## **Robb-Ledford Wildlife Management Area Motorized Travel Management Revision**

**FWP-DN-WL-R3-24-064**

**October 11, 2024**



## Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes to revise the routes open to motorized travel within the Robb-Ledford Wildlife Management Area (WMA) to: 1) increase elk security and retention during the general rifle hunting season; 2) improve non-motorized hunting opportunity within the WMA; and 3) reduce soil erosion and noxious weed establishment. Specific objectives include:

- A. Reduce the density of routes open to motorized travel during the general rifle season to less than 1.0 miles-per-square-mile, as recommended by Lyon (1979) to minimize displacement of elk.
- B. Manage for  $\geq 30\%$  of the WMA to meet elk security criteria during the general rifle season as recommended by Hills et al. (1991). Elk security areas would be areas of high elk forage quality that are  $\geq 1,535$  m (0.95 mi) from the nearest route open to motorized vehicles, as recommended by Ranglack et al. (2017). Proposed non-motorized areas would align with portions of the WMA where undisturbed wintering elk are most frequently observed during population surveys.
- C. Manage at least one contiguous area within the WMA during the general rifle season, that when combined with adjoining public lands, is  $\geq 1,535$  m (0.95 mi) from the nearest route open to motorized travel and  $\geq 20.2$  km<sup>2</sup> (5,000 acres), as recommended by Ranglack et al. (2017).
- D. Manage for at least one watershed within the WMA as a non-motorized-only hunting opportunity during the general rifle season.
- E. Reduce vegetation loss and soil erosion, resulting from motorized travel, by reducing the number of motorized routes that ascend steep aspects.
- F. Reduce user confusion regarding where motor vehicle use is and is not authorized by simplifying the network of motorized routes, installing motorized use informational kiosks at WMA entrances, and maintaining motorized-use signs on all routes.

Recreational motorized use would be restricted to authorized routes only. No off-route recreational motorized travel would be authorized. This would include instances where snowdrifts physically prevent motorized vehicle passage. Implementation would begin with public notification during fall 2024. Motorized route signage installation would occur during spring 2025, prior to the WMA opening for recreational use.

## Compliance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act

Before a proposed *project* may be approved, environmental review must be conducted to identify and consider potential impacts of the proposed project on the human and physical environment affected by the project. The Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) and its implementing rules and regulations require different levels of environmental review, depending on the proposed project, significance of potential impacts, and the review timeline. § 75-1-201, Montana Code Annotated (“MCA”), and the Administrative Rules of Montana (“ARM”) 12.2.430, General Requirements of the Environmental Review Process.

FWP must prepare an EA when:

- It is considering a “state-proposed project,” which is defined in § 75-1-220(8)(a) as:
  - (i) a project, program, or activity initiated and directly undertaken by a state agency;
  - (ii) ... a project or activity supported through a contract, grant, subsidy, loan, or other form of funding assistance from a state agency, either singly or in combination with one or more other state agencies; or
  - (iii) ... a project or activity authorized by a state agency acting in a land management capacity for a lease, easement, license, or other authorization to act.
- It is not clear without preparation of an EA whether the proposed project is a major one significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. ARM 12.2.430(3)(a));
- FWP has not otherwise implemented the interdisciplinary analysis and public review purposes listed in ARM 12.2.430(2) (a) and (d) through a similar planning and decision-making process (ARM 12.2.430(3)(b));
- Statutory requirements do not allow sufficient time for the FWP to prepare an EIS (ARM 12.2.430(3)(c));
- The project is not specifically excluded from MEPA review according to § 75-1-220(8)(b) or ARM 12.2.430(5); or
- As an alternative to preparing an EIS, prepare an EA whenever the project is one that might normally require an EIS, but effects which might otherwise be deemed significant appear to be mitigable below the level of significance through design, or enforceable controls or stipulations or both imposed by the agency or other government agencies. For an EA to suffice in this instance, the agency must determine that all the impacts of the proposed project have been accurately identified, that they will be mitigated below the level of significance, and that no significant impact is likely to occur. The agency may not consider compensation for purposes of determining that impacts have been mitigated below the level of significance (ARM 12.2.430(4)).

MEPA is procedural; its intent is to ensure that impacts to the environment associated with a proposed project are fully considered and the public is informed of potential impacts resulting from the project.

## Summary of Public Comment

One public comment was received and was supportive of the proposed project.

## Summary of Comments supporting the proposed project: One (1) received.

1. *“I am a resident of Dillon and a frequent user of the Robb-Ledford WMA. I have spent countless days hunting and recreating on the game range with family and friends over the past two decades. Having experienced the issues and frustrations related to road density and off-road travel, especially during hunting season I am in full support of the Management Revision for*

*Motorized Travel that has been put forth by the department. After reviewing the EA, the justifications and proposed actions are spot on. I am confident this will have a significant positive impact on big game security and the WMA's ability to hold elk better during the general hunting season. Once enforced, this will result in a tremendous increase of high-quality hunting opportunities on the WMA. Please move forward and approve this much needed revision."*

**FWP Response:** FWP agrees with the comment.

**Summary of Comments opposing the proposed project: None (0) received.**

No public comments in opposition to the proposed project were received.

**FWP Response:** No Response.

## Decision

Based on the EA and having received one supportive public comment, it's my decision to proceed with the proposed action. To revise the routes, open to motorized travel, within the Robb-Ledford Wildlife Management Area (WMA) to: 1) increase elk security and retention during the general rifle hunting season; 2) improve non-motorized hunting opportunity within the WMA; and 3) reduce soil erosion and noxious weed establishment.

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Nathan Lance  
Acting Region 3 Supervisor