



DECISION NOTICE

Vandalia WMA Management Agreement and Associated Management Actions FWP-DN-WLD-R6-24-009

12/10/24

ACTION

Decision Notice (DN). Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) shall prepare a DN for the proposed action. The DN must identify the agency decision, the reasons for the decision, and any special conditions surrounding the decision or its implementation.

With this action, FWP hereby adopts the Draft Environmental Assessment or Draft EA as final, without modification, and approves Alternative 2, the proposed action.

AUTHORITY: MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

According to the applicable requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act or MEPA and its implementing rules and regulations, before a proposed action may be approved, environmental review must be conducted to identify, consider, and disclose any potential impacts of the proposed action on the affected human environment. The level of environmental review will vary with the complexity and seriousness of environmental issues associated with a proposed action. The level of public interest will also vary. The agency is responsible for adjusting public review to match these factors. *Title 75, Chapter 1, Parts 1 through 3, Montana Code Annotated (MCA)*.

Based on these factors, FWP determined a Checklist EA (Draft EA) constitutes the appropriate level of review for the proposed action. Therefore, to assess and disclose potential impacts of the proposed action, FWP prepared a Draft EA for public review and comment. See *Public Participation Process* below.

Further, FWP must consider any substantive comments received in response to an EA and proceed in accordance with one of the following steps: determine the EA did not adequately reflect the issues raised by the proposed action and issue an Environmental Impact Statement or EIS; determine the EA did not adequately reflect the issues raised by the proposed action and issue a supplemental EA; or determine the Draft EA adequately addressed the issues raised by the proposed action and make a final decision, with appropriate modification resulting from the analysis provided in the Draft EA and the analysis of any substantive public comments received. See *Public Comment and FWP Response* below.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS

The Draft EA was made available for public review and comment from November 14th to November 29th. The Draft EA was posted on FWP's Public Notice webpage: <https://fwp.mt.gov/news/public-notice>. The Draft EA was also made available for public review on the Environmental Quality Council or EQC website: <https://leg.mt.gov/mepa/search/>, by individual request, and through notice to identified interested parties to include neighboring properties. FWP did not receive comments during the public comment period.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

The Vandalia Wildlife Management Area (WMA) encompasses approximately 387 acres of U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) lands under FWP management from 1994-2024. A 30-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the BOR, Glasgow Irrigation District, and FWP, granted FWP the management authority over the public recreation, wildlife, and other resource values associated with this land. This MOU expired in June 2024. The purpose of this proposed project is to enter into a new 20-year Management Agreement with BOR that allows FWP to continue management of the Vandalia WMA to include management actions such as prescribed grazing and other habitat improvement actions. A new management agreement between BOR and FWP has been drafted with the intended purpose that the land is to continue to be managed for public recreation, wildlife, and other resource uses by FWP.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the proposed project is to continue FWP's management of the Vandalia WMA through entering into a 20-year management agreement with BOR for the benefit of public recreation, wildlife, and other resource uses. Vandalia WMA currently provides recreational opportunities in the form of hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing, along with providing forage for land managers to graze cattle. By continuing FWP's management of this site, wildlife habitat values will continue to be improved upon and any livestock grazing and other habitat management actions will be managed in such a way to improve habitat conditions. Benefits of FWP's continued management of the Vandalia WMA include:

- Improved nesting, brood rearing, and winter cover for upland birds
- Improved nesting cover for waterfowl
- Improved forage conditions for big game species
- Improved soil and vegetative health through prescriptive grazing strategies
- Continued weed management to prevent/control infestations
- Continued public recreation focus to management objectives

ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED

Alternative 1: No Action

In addition to the proposed action, and as required by MEPA, FWP analyzes the "No-Action" alternative in the EA. Under the No-Action alternative, the proposed action would not occur. Therefore, no additional impacts to the human environment would occur. The No Action alternative forms the baseline from which the potential impacts of the proposed action may be measured.

Under the no action alternative, FWP would not continue management of the Vandalia WMA. Management of the public recreation, wildlife, and other resource uses would revert to the BOR. The BOR would have the ability to limit or expand public recreational use and the ability to issue grazing permits.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action, the public recreation, wildlife, and other resource uses on the Vandalia WMA would continue to be managed by FWP for an additional 20 years.

PUBLIC COMMENT AND FWP RESPONSE

No public comments were received during the public comment period.

DECISION

Based on the environmental review provided in the Draft EA, and in accordance with all applicable laws, rules, regulations, and policies, FWP determined the proposed action (Alternative 2), will not have significant adverse impacts on the human environment associated with the proposed action and constitutes a reasonable and appropriate strategy to achieve identified objectives. Therefore, preparation of an EIS is unnecessary. FWP hereby adopts the Draft EA as final and approves the Alternative 2, the proposed action.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Drew Henry", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Drew Henry
Regional Supervisor – Region 6
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks