

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 13, 2016

Agenda Item: 2016 HB 454 Hunting Access Agreements

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Min

Background

Under the provisions of 87-2-513 MCA, FWP received the authority to issue either-sex or antlerless elk permits to landowners for management purposes. The landowner must offer free public elk hunting, meet the various conditions of the statute, and enter a contractual public elk hunting access agreement with FWP. The contract defines the areas open to public elk hunting, the number of elk hunting days that will be allowed on the property, and other factors that FWP and the landowner consider necessary for the proper management of elk on the landowner's property.

There are two proposed agreements: the John Swanz Ranch and the Robert Lee Ranch. The Swanz Agreement specifies two 411-21 either-sex permits for Mr. Swanz and/or a family member(s), while the Robert Lee Ranch agreement specifies one 411-22 either-sex permit for Robert Lee or a family member. In turn, FWP would issue eight additional 411-21 permits for the John Swanz property and four for the Robert Lee property from the already randomized list of unsuccessful applicants for the 411-20 either-sex permit. Successful applicants could only hunt on the deeded property for the specified ranch. The Swanz agreement was first used in 2002 and has been reapplied annually since based upon continued positive post-hunt evaluations. The Access Agreements were included in the May commission packet.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The Swanz agreement has received public review in previous years via the Commission's hunting season setting process. To date, that review has generated relatively few public comments. Additionally, the post-hunt evaluations have sought feedback from all identified hunters and the landowner. To date, the evaluations confirm that agreement terms, and reasonable expectations, are generally being met. The Robert Lee Ranch agreement was new last year and got good reviews. The public comment period ran through June 17 and we received 22 comments, but only 12 spoke to the subject with 11 supportive and 1 opposed landowner bull tags. Among other comments 1 opposed all hunting, 3 were on trapping and/or grizzly bears, and other unrelated subjects.

Alternatives and Analysis

Failure to approve this agreement may result in reduced public elk hunting access in this area. Existing agreement terms have met with positive reviews of these working access opportunities with no adverse resource impact identified.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the Commission approve the proposed Swanz and Lee Hunting Access Agreements.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Fish & Wildlife Commission approve the proposed John Swanz Ranch and Robert Lee Ranch hunting access agreements as presented by FWP.