

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: June 19, 2019

Agenda Item: The Nature Conservancy Biennial Rule Regulating Use on The Nature Conservancy Recreation Management Area Lands (R2)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

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Background

This proposal would extend for two years The Nature Conservancy (TNC) Recreation Management Area (RMA) biennial rule previously established by the Fish and Wildlife Commission in August 2015 (and renewed 2017). During the winter of 2014-15, FWP met with TNC's Montana office to discuss ideas for a possible land recreation management plan for TNC's 163,883 acres in Missoula and Powell counties, including TNC's Clearwater-Blackfoot Project acquisition of 117,152 acres purchased from Plum Creek Timber Company in January 2015. The proposed renewal of this biennial rule would provide continued year-round recreational access for free public use to TNC's land in FWP's Region 2.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The Fish & Wildlife Commission endorsed the tentative RMA biennial-rule renewal for public comment at its February 13, 2019, meeting. The proposed biennial rule and a cover letter outlining the review process were posted on FWP's website for 30 days, from April 11 through May 10, 2019, and Region 2 issued a statewide news release. Comments could be made directly on the proposal's webpage or submitted to R2 via mail or email. FWP sent 52 emails of its availability to interested individuals, groups, and agencies, and mailed two printed copies. FWP received five comments during the public comment period. The commenters included five people (two commented together and were counted as one comment) and one group, the Anaconda Sportsman's Club (ASC). Commenters included three from Seeley Lake, and one each from Anaconda, Bozeman, and Missoula. Four comments (including ASC) supported the biennial rule renewal, and one comment (Seeley Lake) did not indicate specific support or opposition.

Alternatives and Analysis

Renewing this RMA biennial rule would allow FWP to continue to help manage public access on these private lands, enabling TNC to keep these lands open for public recreation while reducing resource damage, preventing vehicular damage to soils and vegetation, and avoiding excess disturbance to native wildlife (including threatened and endangered species and Montana species of concern). Without these rules, TNC may close its lands to public access.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends the commission approve this proposed rule. The rule would allow FWP to work in partnership with TNC to provide a significant amount of managed public recreation access to high-quality private lands in west-central Montana.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Fish & Wildlife Commission approve the renewal of the Recreation Management Area Biennial Rule for The Nature Conservancy's lands in Missoula and Powell counties in FWP's Region 2.