



DECISION NOTICE

BECKMAN WMA AGRICULTURAL LEASE

Region 4 Headquarters
4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 454-5840

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVE CONSIDERED:

Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) is seeking to offer a 6-year agricultural lease on the Beckman Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The lease would be awarded using a bid process to establish a mutually-beneficial haying lease between a lessee and MFWP, wherein the lessee would irrigate and hay one (or possibly two) cuttings of grass/alfalfa fields totaling ~75 acres, and then will continue irrigating the fields for fall wildlife forage. The bid that best serves the needs of wildlife habitat would be selected. The proposed action would result in high quality forage and enhanced wildlife habitat available for ungulates and other species on the Beckman WMA. The proposed action may also reduce some game damage issues on neighboring properties.

No Action

For the No Action Alternative, MFWP would not pursue an agricultural hay lease on the Beckman WMA. In the absence of irrigation, the ~75 acres of hay fields would green up briefly during spring, but then dry and become decadent over the summer. They would become weedy and require extra management and costs to restore them to a permanent cover type.

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT PUBLIC PROCESS:

MFWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and make a decision based on this information. MFWP released a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for public review of the proposed action on March 2, 2021 and accepted public comment until 5:00 P. M. on March 23, 2021.

Copies of the EA were distributed to Fergus County Commissioners, neighboring landowners, interested individuals, groups, and agencies to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project. The EA was also available for public review on MFWP's web site (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>, "Recent

Public Notices" and "Environmental Assessments") for the duration of the comment period. MFWP also issued a News Release.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT & RESPONSE TO COMMENTS:

FWP received no comments during the public comment period.

DECISION:


In evaluating the environmental effects and other relevant information, I recommend that MFWP pursue an agricultural hay lease on the Beckman WMA, recommend the Fish & Wildlife Commission approve the proposed action as well. Ultimate decision authority is the Fish & Wildlife Commission.

Through the MEPA process, MFWP found no significant impacts on the human or physical environments associated with this proposal. Therefore, the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and an environmental impact statement is not required.

After review of this proposal, it is my decision to accept the draft EA as supplemented by this Decision Notice and the summary/response to public comment contained herein. In combination, these documents constitute the Final EA. MFWP believes the completion of this project is in the best interests of working agricultural landscapes, fish and wildlife, and public recreation.



Gary Bertellotti
Region 4 Supervisor



Date