



FWP REGION 1

490 N. MERIDAN RD.

Kalispell, MT 59901

PUBLIC SCOPING NOTICE
PROPOSED FOREST HABITAT IMPROVEMENT AND FUELS REDUCTION PROJECT ON RAY KUHN'S
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

May 1, 2023

PROPOSED ACTION

Notice of intent to implement a forest habitat improvement and fuels reduction project on Ray Kuhns Wildlife Management Area (WMA), prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed action, and conduct public scoping.

INTRODUCTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) announces its intention to prepare an EA and conduct scoping on the proposed action to implement a forest habitat improvement and fuels reduction project on the Ray Kuhns WMA. FWP determined the proposed action constitutes a state action with the potential to affect the quality of the physical and human environment; therefore, according to the requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA, § 75-1-101 *et. seq.*, MCA), and its implementing rules (ARM 12.2.429 *et. seq.*), development of a detailed environmental review using the form and prescribed process of an EA is required.

The EA will be prepared in accordance with the applicable requirements of MEPA and will address potential impacts to the physical and human environment resulting from the proposed action and the reasonable range of alternatives considered to accomplish the objectives of the proposed action.

AUTHORITY

87-1-201(9)(a)(iv), 87-1-622, and 87-1-621, MCA

FWP is required to implement programs that address fire mitigation, pine beetle infestation, and wildlife habitat enhancement giving priority to forested lands in excess of 50 contiguous acres in any state park, fishing access site, or wildlife management area under the department's jurisdiction; in accordance with the forest management plan and based on an annual sustained yield. The Montana Legislature has provided FWP the means to accrue revenue from forest management activities and spend them to fund further management projects on its forested lands.

BACKGROUND AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The 1,560-acre Ray Kuhns WMA, situated along Farm to Market Road, provides wildlife habitat, hunting opportunities, and critical winter range for big game, particularly white-tailed deer. The WMA was acquired through a series of land purchases occurring from 1953 to 1981. The tree canopy in the forested portions of the WMA provide important snow intercept, thermal cover, and understory forage for white-tailed deer. During the winter months, as many as 500 deer per square mile occupy the WMA and surrounding lands, including herds of year-round resident deer and migratory deer herds traveling

from Good Creek, Star Meadows, and surrounding areas. Due to its proximity to Kalispell and Whitefish, the WMA is a popular area for hunting, hiking, horseback riding, biking, and wildlife viewing.

While the forests on the WMA provide critical winter range for white-tailed deer, the existing dense stands are at increasing susceptibility to bark beetle infestations and severe fire due to forest succession, fire exclusion, drought, and increasing bark beetle populations within the WMA and surrounding area. Portions of the WMA have been identified as *Priority Areas for Focused Attention* in the [Montana Forest Action Plan](#)¹ (2020) due to wildfire risk, proximity to the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), and insects and disease risk.

FWP is proposing to treat approximately 150 to 200 acres with the primary objectives of promoting and maintaining forest cover as wintering habitat for white-tailed deer in the long-term and reducing hazardous fuels that could result in severe fire. The project area is within the *Connecting Fuels Treatments in the Salish Mountains and Whitefish Range* [Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership Project](#)². FWP intends to participate with the project partners and implement the priorities identified in the project where they are compatible with FWP objectives. FWP also intends to seek grant funding through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership Project.

The EA would analyze a minimum of two alternatives, including a "No Action Alternative" and the "Proposed Action Alternative," which would include activities such as commercial thinning (removal of merchantable trees), non-commercial thinning (removal of sub-merchantable trees), prescribed burning, rehab (such as grass seeding and noxious weed control), and minor road maintenance and improvements to facilitate access to the treatment units. Other reasonable alternatives could be considered to accomplish the objectives of the proposed action.

PURPOSE AND NEED

FWP is proposing to implement a forest habitat improvement and fuels reduction project on Ray Kuhns WMA, prepare an EA for the proposed action, and conduct public scoping for the purpose of:

- Managing forest stands towards a desired condition that promotes and maintains long term canopy cover for big game winter range;
- reducing hazardous fuels that could result in severe fire;
- increasing understory forage production;
- reducing the treated stands' susceptibility to bark beetle infestation; and
- reduce threats to conifer-dominated forest and woodland (xeric-mesic), a Tier 1 Community Type of Greatest Conservation Need ([Montana's State Wildlife Action Plan](#)³ 2015).

IMPORTANT DATES AND HOW TO PROVIDE COMMENT

FWP invites interested agencies, organizations, and members of the public to submit suggestions to assist in identifying potential issues associated with the proposed action and in determining the appropriate scope of the EA. More specifically, public input received during the scoping period will help FWP determine public interest, identify potential issues that would require further analysis, and may provide further insight for refining the proposal or developing and analyzing additional alternatives.

The 30-day public scoping period begins with the publication of this Scoping Notice and will continue through **Saturday, May 30, 2023**. FWP will consider all applicable input received or postmarked by the deadline, in defining the scope of the EA.

Comments and suggestions on the content and scope of the EA should be addressed to:

FWP Region 1 Office
c/o Public Scoping R Kuhns WMA
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
490 N. Meridian
Kalispell, MT 59901

Or, via electronic mail at: Ethan.Lula@mt.gov

If you have any questions regarding the proposed project, please call or email: (406) 882-4109 or Ethan.Lula@mt.gov

Thanks for your time and consideration of this proposed action.

Sincerely,

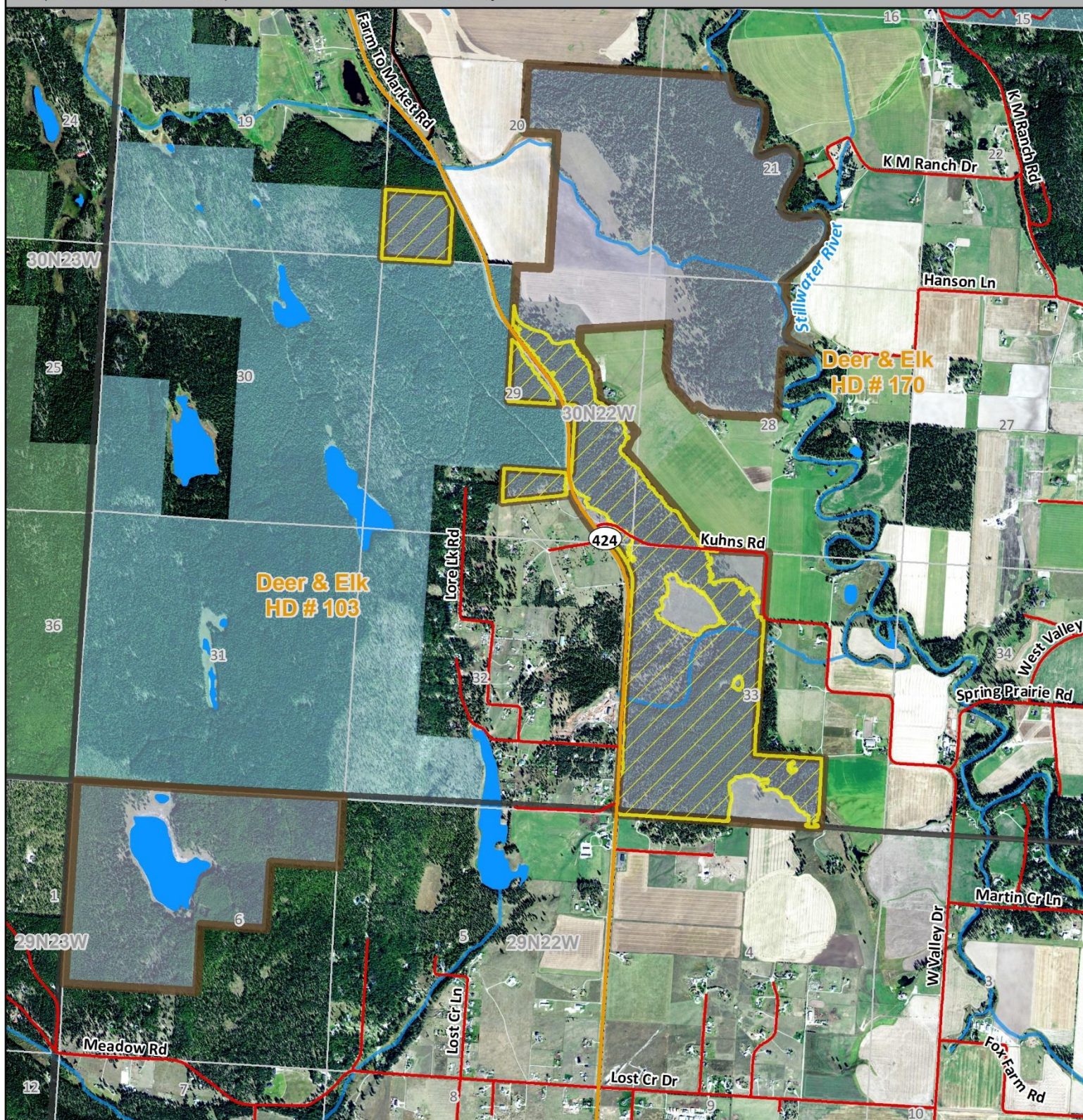


Lee Anderson
Regional Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

¹ Montana Forest Action Plan: <https://www.montanaforestactionplan.org/pages/forest-action-plan> (last accessed March 29, 2023)

² Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Project: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs-initiatives/joint-chiefs-landscape-restoration-partnership/montana/connecting-fuels> (last accessed March 29, 2023)

³ Montana's State Wildlife Action Plan: <https://myfwp.mt.gov/getRepositoryFile?objectID=70168> (last accessed March 30, 2023)



- Proposed Project Area
- US Forest Service
- Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
- Montana State Trust Land
- Wildlife Management Area Boundary
- Hunting Districts (Deer, Elk, Lion)
- Highways**
- MT; S; US
- Major Roads
- Streams**
- Streams

Scale 1: 31,680
1 in = 1/2 mile



Map Produced by: Jason Parke, Forester
Wildlife Division/Habitat Bureau
Ray Kuhns WMA, Scoping Notice
April 5, 2023



0 0.25 0.5
Miles