



490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

October 30, 2020

Scoping Notice

Re: Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks land proposal

Dear Interested Party:

Proposed Project Description

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) may be preparing an Environmental Analysis on a proposal to acquire land through a fee simple purchase in Flathead County, Montana. FWP is working with the Flathead Land Trust on a proposed acquisition of 800 acres of forest along 1.6 miles of the Flathead River near Columbia Falls to protect water quality and important fish and wildlife habitat, while providing free public recreation access (see attached map). The property is highly developable and threatened by the rapidly growing city of Columbia Falls, but would be protected as a Wildlife Management Area under this proposal. The Columbia Falls Aluminum Company (CFAC), a subsidiary of Glencore, a multi-national company, has decided to dispose of this property. The property is winter range for elk, moose, and white-tailed deer. Completion of this project would safeguard vital habitat and a travel corridor for bull trout and grizzly bears, Endangered Species Act-listed Threatened species found on the property. This key corridor is located at a geographic pinch point where the Flathead River flows through the very narrow Bad Rock Canyon. The project is adjacent to a large block of public lands and would add to a 12,000-acre network of conserved land along a 43-mile reach of the Flathead River between Columbia Falls and Flathead Lake. The property currently provides an excellent opportunity for youth hunters to harvest elk and white-tailed deer just minutes from Columbia Falls, which would also be lost if this property were developed. A trail has been constructed on the property by Gateway to Glacier Trail, Inc., a local nonprofit group granted a revocable license issued by CFAC to allow access for hikers, bikers, birdwatchers, and others. Under FWP ownership, public access could be managed to preserve wildlife presence and hunting opportunities while allowing compatible trail and property use.

CFAC has given FWP and the Flathead Land Trust, our partner on this project, a two-year window to complete this project. The USFS Forest Legacy Program, Habitat Montana, and Pittman-Robertson could all be possible funding sources for this project, along with private funding raised by the Flathead Land Trust. If the project fails, the property would most likely be

quickly sold, subdivided, and developed into a high-density neighborhood which would include highly sought-after riverfront lots.

Project Objectives

The primary objectives of this land project include:

- Protecting habitat and a movement corridor for fish and wildlife species;
- Providing hunting and recreational opportunities for the public while preserving the wildlife use of the property; and
- Protecting the valuable wetlands and riparian areas on this property which in turn protects water quality in Flathead River and Flathead Lake.

Public Involvement and Process

The 30-day scoping period will begin on *October 30, 2020*. Please submit either written or e-mailed comments by ***November 29, 2020*** to:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Kris Tempel, Habitat Conservation Biologist
Re: Proposed Wildlife Management Area
490 N. Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901
ktempel@mt.gov

Comments received during this scoping period will help FWP determine public interest, identify potential issues that would require further analysis, and may provide insight for refining the proposal or for developing and analyzing one or more alternatives. Upon completion of the scoping phase, FWP will determine next steps, which may include conducting an environmental analysis with additional opportunity for public input or taking no further action on the proposed project.

If you have any questions regarding this project or scoping process, please contact Kris Tempel at (406) 249-7481 or via email at ktempel@mt.gov.

Sincerely,



Jim Williams
Region One Supervisor

