



**Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks**

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PUBLIC NOTICE

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) invites the public to comment on its proposal to purchase the final 3,834 acres of private inholdings within the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA), at a price of \$3.3 million. If implemented, this proposal would complete the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Project, which was begun in 1999 with the goal of bringing some 7,800 acres of Plum Creek Timber Company inholdings into FWP or other public ownership in a series of phased transactions. FWP's purpose for purchasing the land is to ensure the continued availability of important winter range for elk and deer populations by preventing the possibility of future residential or other development within the BCWMA.

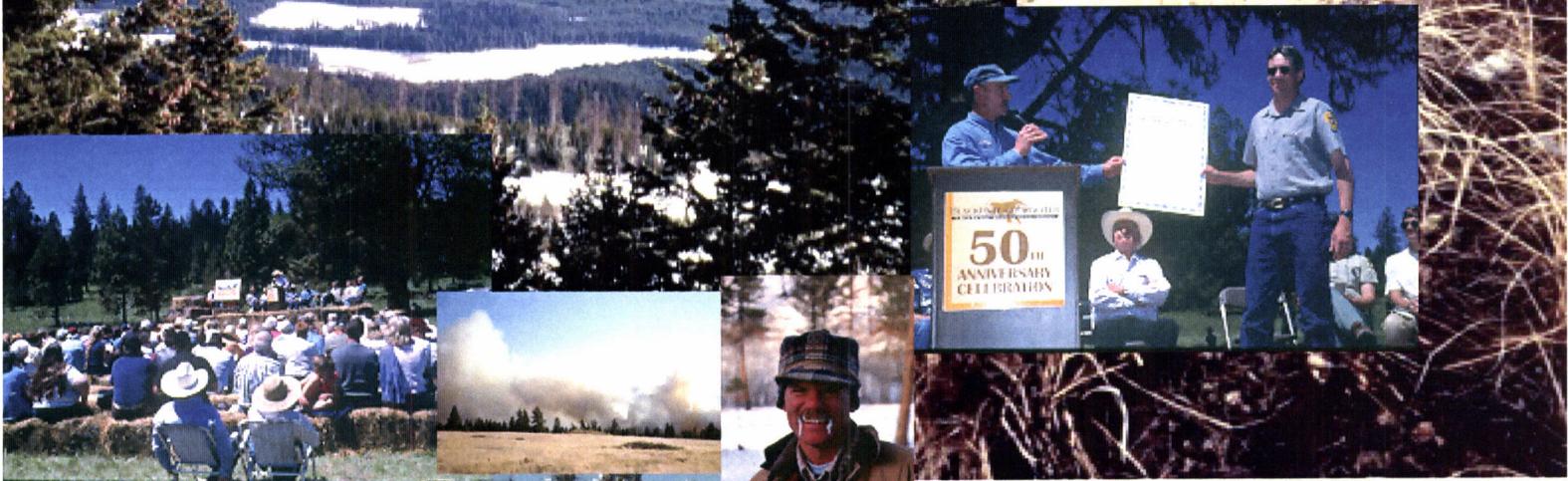
A Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) will be available for review and comment beginning Thursday, April 15, 2004. You may obtain a copy electronically at the FWP website (<http://www.fwp.state.mt.us>), or by contacting Mike Thompson, FWP, 3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804, phone 406-542-5500, e-mail [mthompson@state.mt.us](mailto:mthompson@state.mt.us)

Comments must be directed to the mail, phone, or e-mail address listed above, and must be received or postmarked no later than May 14, 2004. A public meeting to discuss the proposal will be held at the Seeley Lake Community Center on April 28, 2004, at 7:00 P.M.

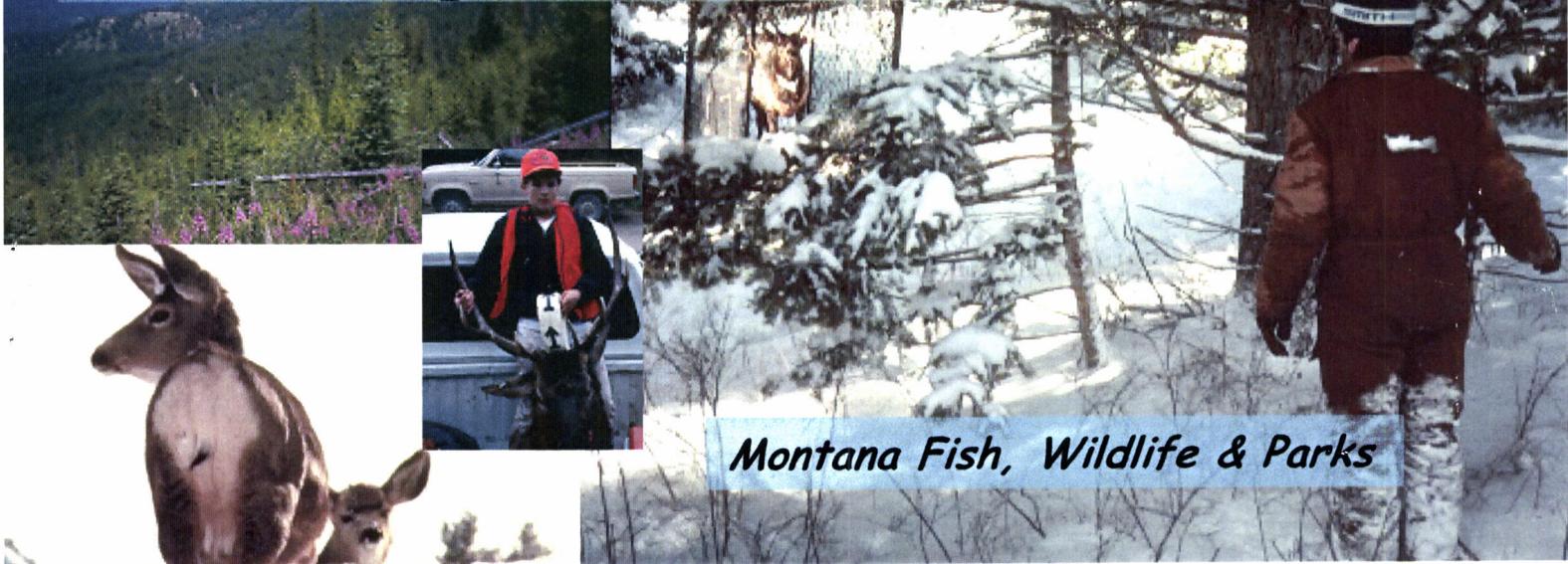
*April 12, 2004*

A Proposal to Complete the Purchase  
of Private Inholdings Within the

# *Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area*



Draft Environmental Assessment  
Draft Socio-Economic Assessment  
Draft Management Plan



*Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*

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### **APPENDIX A: DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **APPENDIX B: DRAFT SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT**

Draft Environmental Assessment  
(April 9, 2004)

A Proposal by  
***Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks***  
to Purchase 3,834 Acres  
within the  
Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area  
from the  
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Prepared by:

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## INTRODUCTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) invites the public to comment on this proposal to purchase 3,834 acres from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), at a price of \$3.3 million. FWP expects to reimburse its Habitat Montana Program in the amount of \$3.3 million with a grant from the federal Forest Legacy Program in early 2005. Plum Creek Timber Company currently owns the property. Although it is located within the administrative boundary of the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA), in Missoula and Powell counties, the land is not protected from the possibility of a future property sale and subdivision. This land contains the principal winter range for a migratory population of about 800-900 mule deer and forms an integral component of the larger winter concentration area for migratory populations of 900-1,100 elk and several-hundred white-tailed deer. FWP's purpose for purchasing the land is to manage important habitat for deer, elk and other wildlife, and prevent this habitat from being sold and subdivided for residential, commercial or industrial development. Upon assuming ownership, FWP would manage habitat to enhance forest and shrub-field forage for mule deer and elk. FWP would manage public access and recreation in keeping with traditional FWP practices on the BCWMA and in Hunting District 282. A draft management plan for the subject lands is attached in Appendix A.

FWP makes annual payments to the counties in lieu of property taxes on lands in its ownership. These payments are equal to the annual property taxes assessed to privately owned property. Therefore, this proposal would not result in a loss of property tax revenue to the counties.

## PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

### Statements of Purpose

#### *From the BCWMA long-term management plan (revised 1989)*

**Objective I:** Manage for the maximum sustainable utilization of the winter range by elk, mule deer and white-tailed deer within the following standards:

- Soil condition and development will be maintained or enhanced;
- Adverse impacts to adjacent landowners will be reduced or mitigated;
- The condition of elk and deer populations will be maintained or enhanced;
- Elk and deer populations will be supported by natural winter forage;
- Adverse impacts on other resources such as fisheries, riparian habitats, water quality, native plant communities, and other animal populations will be avoided or mitigated. Opportunities to enhance these resources will be pursued when compatible with elk and deer management (as time and funding allow).

**Objective II:** Maximize public access and recreation opportunities within the following standards:

- Other WMA objectives (i.e., wildlife) will not be compromised;
- Diverse opportunities for appreciation and enjoyment by the public will be maintained. (Recreation opportunities include hunting, fishing, trapping, touring, camping, picnicking, hiking, bike-riding and horseback riding.)

**Problem C1:** FWP does not control land management on leased lands. Future real estate transactions or developments on leased lands are beyond FWP's control and could jeopardize the integrity of the WMA.

**Strategy C1:** Pursue potential land exchanges to gain FWP control in the Blanchard Flats, Boyd Mountain and Sperry Grade units. Conservation easements [or fee-title purchases] might be negotiated to increase control of high priority leased lands.

***Purposes specifically addressed by this proposal:***

- Protect public investments and progress over the past 50 years toward establishment of an effective and secure winter range (i.e., BCWMA) for elk and deer populations of the Clearwater River, Cottonwood Creek and Monture Creek drainages;
- Prevent the possibility of irreversible habitat loss if key private inholdings within the BCWMA are sold in the future and eventually subdivided or developed;

- Maintain and enhance forested forage on Boyd Mountain (BCWMA) to address a habitat limitation in periods of harsh winter weather for migratory populations of 900-1,100 elk and 300-400 mule deer;
- Maintain and enhance nonforested shrub-fields that are the primary winter range for 500-600 mule deer and up to 150 elk;
- Continue to provide access for unlimited numbers of recreationists (permit required for groups of more than 30 people) from May 15 through the general archery season (~October 15) and hunting opportunities for deer and elk (by permit) from ~October 15-November 10; continue to close BCWMA lands within Hunting District 282 to all public entry from November 11-May 14 to minimize disturbances of wintering wildlife.
- Achieve these purposes using the most cost-effective means that will allow FWP adequate control over management of habitat and public access on the subject lands in perpetuity.

#### **Authorities/Direction**

FWP is authorized by State law to own and manage lands as wildlife habitat. The Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission (the Commission) is the decision-making authority for matters of land acquisition, disposal or exchange involving FWP-owned properties. Following Commission approval, if granted, the Montana Board of Land Commissioners (the Land Board) reviews land acquisitions, disposals, or exchanges involving FWP-owned properties over 100 acres or \$100,000 in value. FWP's proposed expenditure of \$3.3 million to purchase the subject lands would come from its Habitat Montana Program, under policy adopted by the Commission in 1994. Funding for this proposed purchase is enabled by an act of the 1987 Montana Legislature (MCA 87-1-241-242), known as House Bill 526, which earmarked for habitat acquisition a set portion of the revenues generated from sales of Montana Sportsman's and nonresident Big Game Combination licenses.

The land to be purchased by FWP in this proposal would be included in the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA), which was originally purchased with Federal

Aid in Wildlife Restoration monies (Project W-30-L) administered by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the authority of the Pittman-Robertson Act (P-R). Matching funds for acquisition of the BCWMA were provided by FWP from revenues generated by the sale of Montana hunting licenses. FWP uses budgeted license revenues, within spending authority granted each biennium by the Montana legislature, for routine maintenance of the BCWMA. FWP is authorized to use supplemental funds from various public and private sources, which may be awarded under specific conditions for individual maintenance and enhancement projects on the BCWMA and other properties.

FWP established the BCWMA by purchasing the Boyd Ranch in 1948 for the purpose of carrying on wildlife restoration projects in accordance with P-R. More specifically, FWP manages this property primarily to provide important winter range for elk and deer, as outlined and described in the Application for Federal Assistance (Project W-30-L) and management plan for the BCWMA (on file at FWP, Region 2).

#### **Area Description/Wildlife Resources**

The BCWMA comprises about 67,046 acres, with 15,874 acres (24%) in fee-title ownership, 6,849 acres (10%) under FWP conservation easement and owned by DNRC, 887 acres (1%) under FWP conservation easement and owned by private landowners, and the remaining 43,436 acres (65%) included under leases with other state and private landowners. The BCWMA is located in the Blackfoot Valley of west-central Montana, clustered along both sides of the Missoula-Powell Counties line, with most of the property lying along the north side of Highway 200 between Blanchard Creek and Cottonwood Creek. The nearest communities are Clearwater Junction, Woodworth, Seeley Lake, and Ovando. The wood products, ranching and recreation/tourism industries support the local economy. Missoula is the nearest major population center, located about 45 miles west of the BCWMA.

Boyd Mountain, at 5,625-feet in elevation, is the main topographic feature of the BCWMA. Douglas-fir forest is the dominant vegetation at upper elevations, grading into

ponderosa pine forest around the base of the mountain. A gently south-sloping grassland, dominated by rough fescue, covers some 5,000 acres, and separates the steeper, south-facing slopes of Boyd Mountain from the lowest elevations along the Clearwater River (approximately 3,840 feet in elevation).

A migratory elk herd depends upon core habitats within the BCWMA for winter range, and the expansive, rough fescue grassland is the focus of wintering elk concentrations. This elk population has been enhanced from about 200 individuals when FWP first acquired the BCWMA in 1948, to a peak estimate (winter, post-hunting) of 1,183 elk in 2003. Currently, FWP is prescribing liberal antlerless harvests by means of its hunting regulations to decrease the elk population to around 1,000 animals as an annual average. FWP studies of radio-equipped elk have documented a yearlong home range of about 500,000 acres for this BCWMA elk herd, with habitually occupied summer ranges extending from the BCWMA into the Bob Marshall Wilderness Area and Mission Mountains. Thus, changes in elk habitat on the BCWMA may directly affect opportunities for the public to hunt and view elk across a much larger area in west-central Montana, including portions of the Lolo and Flathead National Forests and accessible state, U. S. Bureau of Land Management, and private lands.

Portions of the BCWMA also provide important winter range for migratory and resident subpopulations of 800-900 mule deer and 400-800 white-tailed deer. The occurrence of nearly 200 wildlife species has been documented on the BCWMA in the 1990s (checklist is attached to the Draft Management Plan in Appendix A).

### **Description of Subject Lands**

#### **Location:**

This proposal involves approximately 3,834 acres of land currently owned by Plum Creek Timber Company, L.P., which lies on Boyd Mountain and Sperry Mountain, generally within an area bounded by Highway 200 (south), Highway 83 (west), and Woodworth Road (north and east) (Figure 1). A more precise description follows in Table 1.

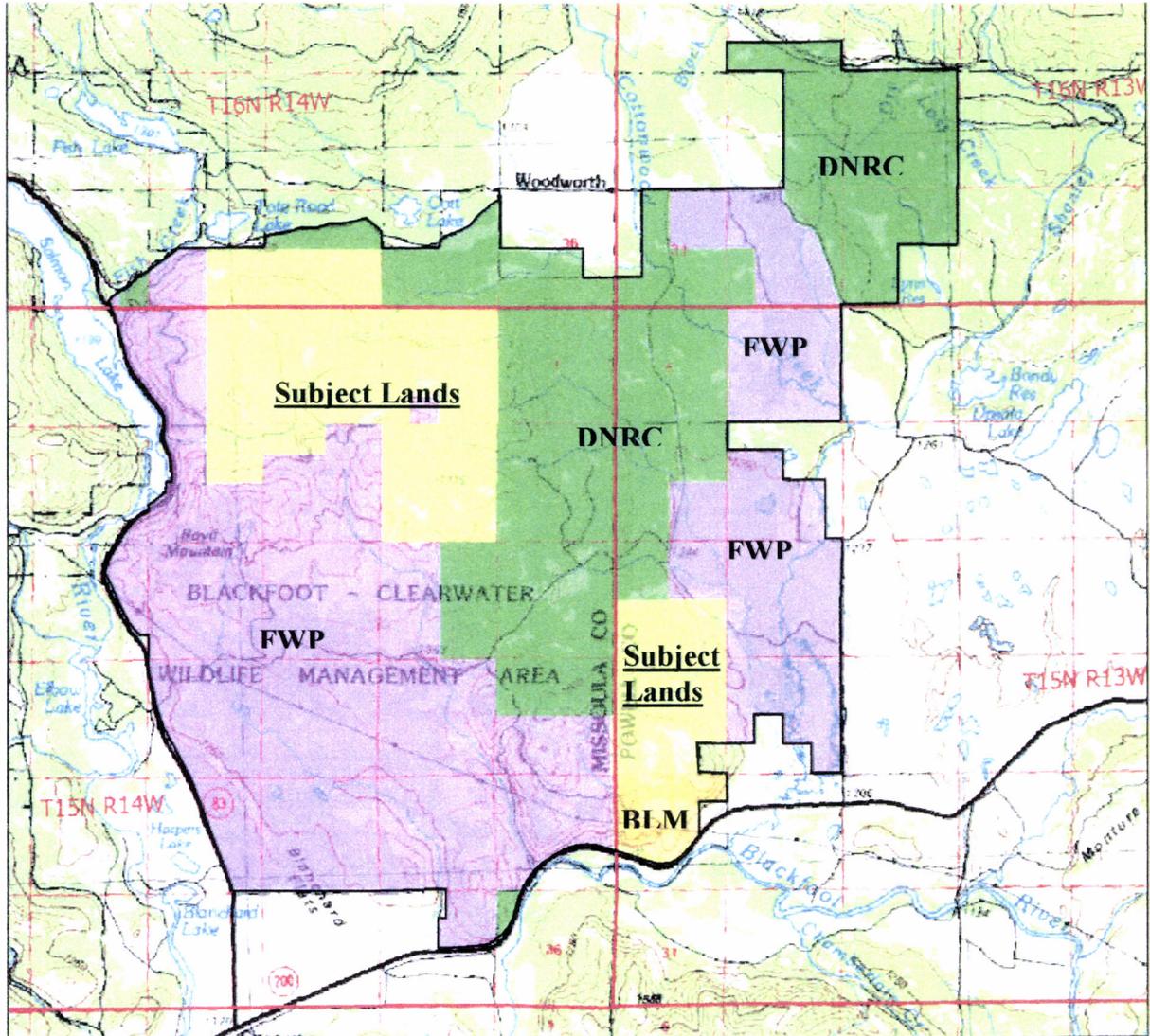


Figure 1. Location of the subject lands in relation to other ownership within the BCWMA.

Table 1. Description of subject lands

**Powell County, Montana**

Township 15 North, Range 13 West

Section 18: Government Lots 3 & 4, E1/2SW1/4, SE1/4 (315.27 acres)

Section 19: Government Lots 1, 2, 3 & 4, E1/2W1/2, NE1/4, W1/2SE1/4, NE1/4SE1/4 (594.80 acres)

**Missoula County, Montana**

Township 15 North, Range 14 West

Section 2: Government Lots 1, 2, 3, & 4, S1/2N1/2, N1/2S1/2, SW1/4SW1/4, S1/2SE1/4 (601.68 acres)

Section 3: Government Lots 1, 2, 3 & 4, S1/2N1/2, S1/2 (641.40 acres)

Section 4: Government Lots 1 & 2, S1/2NE1/4, SE1/4 (321.27 acres)

Section 9: NE1/4 (160 acres)

Section 10: N1/2NW1/4 (80 acres)

Section 11: All (640 acres)

Township 16 North, Range 14 West

Section 33: SE1/4 (160 acres)

Section 34: S1/2 (320 acres)

**Total** – 3834.42 acres

**Ownership:**

Plum Creek acquired the subject lands on November 1, 1993, as part of its purchase of 867,000 acres of Montana timberlands from Champion International Corporation. The Anaconda Company owned the lands at the time the BCWMA was established, and Champion purchased them from the Anaconda Company in 1972. FWP has leased grazing rights on the subject lands since 1948 to prevent domestic livestock from consuming forage required for wintering wildlife, and the landowners have cooperated voluntarily with FWP in allowing and managing public access in a manner compatible with BCWMA objectives. The subject lands are bordered by other lands owned by FWP, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), and the U. S. Bureau of Land Management (all included within the BCWMA). A relatively small proportion of the subject lands boundary abuts private property near lower Cottonwood Creek, and near Tote Road Lake (Figure 1).

### Landscape/Improvements:

The subject lands are steep sloping and dissected by intermittent streams, resulting in a variety of aspects and a scattered distribution of numerous benches, small plateaus and rock outcrops. Intermittent streams cross the property. The highest elevation on the subject lands is about 5,400 feet, on top of Boyd Mountain. The landscape on Boyd Mountain has supported dense, mature forests of Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine in recent years, with overstory canopy coverage averaging more than 50%. Overstory canopy was selectively reduced in a series of commercial timber harvests in the mid-to-late 1990s until 2003 on Boyd Mountain. The portion of the subject lands on Sperry Mountain burned in the mid-1960s, and again in 1991, resulting in open shrub-fields. A network of unsurfaced logging roads has been maintained and improved, which provides access by four-wheel drive vehicle to virtually every timber stand on the property, except on the steepest slopes. A vehicular access point from Highway 83 is located just south of mile marker 7, across from Salmon Lake State Park. Vehicular access from Highway 200 is located about 1.5 miles north on Woodworth Road, at the turn-off to the BCWMA seasonal headquarters. There are no buildings or similar structures on the subject lands.

### Wildlife

The occurrence of nearly 200 wildlife species has been documented on the BCWMA in the 1990s (checklist is attached to the Draft Management Plan in Appendix A). Approximately 115 of these species may be expected to occur in forested habitats on the subject lands.

Use of the subject lands in winter by white-tailed deer, mule deer and elk was intensively studied from 1991-1997 as part of a larger research effort on the BCWMA by G. Ross Baty, under the direction of Dr. C. Les Marcum (University of Montana, Missoula), in cooperation with FWP. The work was funded by the McIntire-Stennis Federal Forestry Program, Lolo National Forest, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and FWP. Original references for the results summarized in this document are listed below, and are available for inspection at FWP's Region 2 office in Missoula:

Baty, G. R., C. L. Marcum, and M. J. Thompson. 1993. Observations of elk and deer competition and commensalism on a western Montana winter range. Pages 58-62 *in* J. D. Cada, J. G. Peterson, and T. N.

Lonner, comps., Proc. Western States and Prov. Elk Workshop, Mont. Dept. of Fish, Wildl. and Parks, Bozeman. 72 pp.

Baty, G. R. 1995. Resource partitioning and browse use by sympatric elk, mule deer and whitetailed deer on a winter range in western Montana. M.S. Thesis, Univ. Montana, Missoula. 228 pp.

Baty, G. R., C. L. Marcum, M. J. Thompson, and J. M. Hillis. 1996. Potential effects of ecosystem management on cervids wintering in ponderosa pine habitats. *Intermountain Journal of Sciences*, 2(1):17.

Dickson, D. 1997. Contractor's report on field work completed February 1-19, 1997. FWP, Missoula.

Data from Baty (1995) and Dickson (1997) support the conclusion that the subject lands form an important component of the BCWMA winter range for elk and mule deer. Under average winter conditions in January-February 1992-1993, 12.1-16.8% of elk tracks counted on the BCWMA were in Baty's Spatial Unit 4, which is the spatial unit that best corresponds with the subject lands on Boyd Mountain. Under prolonged conditions of unusually deep, crusted snow in February 1997, Dickson (1997) found 39.8% of all BCWMA elk tracks in Spatial Unit 4. Under average winter conditions in January-February 1992-1993, 18.8-21.9% of mule deer tracks and 11.8-19.7% of white-tailed deer tracks counted on the BCWMA were in Spatial Unit 4. Under prolonged conditions of unusually deep, crusted snow in February 1997, Dickson (1997) found 36.5% and 6% of all BCWMA mule deer and white-tailed deer tracks in Spatial Unit 4. These data support the analysis presented by Baty et al. (1996) that documented the high value of forested winter habitat for mule deer on the BCWMA. On the surface, Dickson's (1997) report of lowered white-tailed deer use in Spatial Unit 4 during a severe winter would seem to conflict with the apparent dependence of white-tailed deer on connected forest canopies as a component of winter habitat (Baty et al. 1996). However, Baty (1995) explained this previously by documenting the strong affinity of white-tailed deer for a particular forested habitat unit on the western edge of the BCWMA, along the Clearwater River, especially as snow depths accumulate. Therefore, it may be concluded that the subject lands are an important component of winter habitat on the BCWMA for both deer species during most winters, and become increasingly important for mule deer, but less so for white-tailed deer, under severe winter conditions.

Under average winter conditions in January-February 1992-1993, 34.3-42.6% of elk

tracks counted on the BCWMA were in Baty's Spatial Unit 3, which is the spatial unit that best corresponds with the subject lands on Sperry Mountain. Under prolonged conditions of unusually deep, crusted snow in February 1997, Dickson (1997) found 48.6% of all BCWMA elk tracks in Spatial Unit 3. The data that were obtained in 1997 were during a period when elk were completely confined by exceptional snow depths to the forested portions of the ground survey units; thus, elk distribution in 1997 probably poorly fits the specific location of the nonforested subject lands on Sperry Mountain. Under average winter conditions in January-February 1992-1993, 70.5-78.2% of mule deer tracks and 0.9-8.4% of white-tailed deer tracks counted on the BCWMA were in Baty's Spatial Unit 3. A large proportion of mule deer tracks were in the Sperry Grade burn, in habitats characteristic of the subject lands. Under prolonged conditions of unusually deep, crusted snow in February 1997, deer of both species abandoned the burn almost completely (Dickson 1997), but 62.5% and 6.0% of all BCWMA mule deer and white-tailed deer tracks used adjacent forest habitats in Spatial Unit 3. These data support the analysis presented by Baty et al. (1996), which documented the high value of forested winter habitat for mule deer on the BCWMA.

### **Problem Synthesis/Rationale**

The principal winter-spring concentration area for elk, mule deer and white-tailed deer within the BCWMA forms a contiguous block of about 22,500 acres in HD 282 and is divided among five owners: FWP (~11,000 acres), Plum Creek Timber Company, L.P. (~3,800 acres), DNRC (~6,900 acres under FWP conservation easement), the Reinoehl Ranch (641 acres under FWP conservation easement) and the U. S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM, ~360 acres) (Figure 1). This block of land represents approximately 34% of the total land area currently owned or leased by FWP as part of the BCWMA, and is considered by FWP biologists to be the indispensable core of the BCWMA. Any incompatible land-use change or permanent loss of winter habitat within this core area could jeopardize the integrity of the BCWMA as a functional and effective wildlife habitat complex. The importance of the intact core is accentuated by the increasing pace of land development around its periphery (i.e., along Highway 83, Clearwater River, Salmon Lake and Woodworth Road) and the potential for losses in adjacent habitats that

were once connected with the core.

In the mid-1980s, FWP began taking steps to block up FWP ownership or management control in the most critical habitats within the BCWMA. When land subdivision was threatened, FWP negotiated purchase of the Dreyer Ranch in 1989 to secure 2,960 acres of important spring and fall habitat along a primary elk migration link to the core winter range. Also in 1989, FWP and DNRC cooperated to bring 2,367 acres of Champion property into DNRC ownership within the core winter range, and then completed an exchange between the two state agencies in 1995 to transfer most of these Champion lands and additional DNRC lands (totaling 3,487 acres) to FWP. In 1998, FWP exchanged fee-title ownership of 254 acres on the west side of Highway 83 for a perpetual conservation easement across 641 acres of the Reinoehl Ranch.

In 1990, FWP initiated discussions with Champion International Corporation to acquire a perpetual conservation easement that would prevent subdivision and development on the 7,800 acres of corporate inholdings within the core winter range. Talks with Champion continued into 1993, but were curtailed with Champion's decision to sell its Montana timberlands. In early 1994, FWP renewed discussions about the corporate inholdings after Plum Creek Timber Company assumed ownership and management control. Plum Creek officials indicated that the company did not foresee selling or gifting a conservation easement on its lands in the BCWMA, but encouraged FWP to develop opportunities for land exchanges, and talks continued. In late 1998, Plum Creek offered to discuss an initial sale of 856 acres to FWP and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF). This combined with newly emerging opportunities for land exchanges involving DNRC and potentially the Lolo National Forest over the remainder of the 7,800-acre Plum Creek inholdings gave rise to the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Project, commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the BCWMA.

In 2000, Plum Creek sold 856 acres to FWP and RMEF, which constituted Phase 1 of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Project. There was considerable publicity associated with Phase 1 because of the effort spearheaded by RMEF and the Five Valleys Land Trust to raise private funds for this

purchase. RMEF donated its interest in the Phase 1 property (worth approximately \$600,000) to FWP at a meeting of the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission in March 2003.

Phase 2 of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Project was a land exchange involving Plum Creek, DNRC, and FWP. FWP initially approached several potential partners for land exchange, including other state entities, private conservation organizations and neighboring federal agencies. None had sufficient land bases or land management priorities to exchange into the entire Plum Creek inholdings of interest. FWP first approached DNRC in 1995 to suggest a land exchange with Plum Creek to block up DNRC ownership within the BCWMA. DNRC agreed to consider a trade of scattered tracts to Plum Creek in exchange for 3,040 acres of Plum Creek inholdings within the BCWMA. In addition, FWP and DNRC agreed to consider an exchange of lands within the BCWMA to transfer the most critical winter range into FWP ownership. These exchanges were completed in fall 2002. In February 2004, the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission approved FWP's recommendation to purchase a conservation easement over the approximately 6,849 acres of DNRC land within the core BCWMA, and Land Board followed with its concurrence in March.

The subject of this proposal is the third and final phase of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Project. Concurrent with the development and progress of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Project, the Blackfoot Challenge and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) entered into discussions with Plum Creek regarding the future of Plum Creek lands from the BCWMA to the Blackfoot headwaters. The outcome of those discussions and subsequent negotiations was a "purchase and sale" agreement for TNC to purchase about 41,000 acres of Plum Creek land in 2004. TNC and Plum Creek closed on the first 18,000 acres in January 2004. The second closing (scheduled for May 2004) is expected to include the Phase 3 lands (i.e., subject lands) on the BCWMA. TNC intends to conserve the resources and traditional uses of any lands it acquires in the Blackfoot by selling them to private and public entities, in accordance with a disposition plan that is being developed by local communities via a process coordinated by the Blackfoot Challenge. The communities have designated FWP as the preferred entity to acquire the subject lands within the BCWMA. Immediately upon its purchase of the subject lands from Plum Creek in May, TNC will sell them

to RMEF. The role of RMEF would be to hold the land in hopes that this public involvement process will result in approval for FWP to purchase the land from RMEF in June 2004, or as soon as possible afterward.

FWP's interest in acquiring the subject lands, and completing the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Project, is to avoid the probable serious loss of wildlife habitat and public access in the future. This threat is described as probable in the long-run because of strong market incentives to divide scenic and accessible property into small parcels and develop homesites. The potential replacement of elk and deer winter range with houses, fences, driveways, garages, barns, and other structures constitutes a direct loss of exceptional winter habitat values for most of the BCWMA mule deer and elk populations. Human activity associated with residential areas, including vehicle traffic, livestock, pets and outdoor recreation, would displace elk and deer from otherwise suitable habitat within an expanded radius around the homes. Additional explorations by pets and humans into the BCWMA interior would be predicted as a fact of human nature, even though the BCWMA is closed to all public entry from November 11-May 14. Future residents might even choose to introduce artificial food sources to attract wintering deer and elk, which would disrupt natural movements and habitat-use patterns, and concentrate animals in a manner that would degrade native habitats and increase the probability of disease transmission. The potential for these impacts to wildlife, as well as lost access and recreational opportunities for the general public, would increase as housing densities increased, but FWP predicts that serious impacts could occur with only one poorly located and managed homesite on the subject lands.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION**

FWP proposes to purchase the 3,834 subject acres from RMEF, at a price of \$3.3 million. FWP's purposes for purchasing the subject lands are to manage important habitat for deer, elk and other wildlife, and prevent this habitat from being sold and subdivided for residential, commercial or industrial development. Upon assuming ownership, FWP would manage habitat to enhance forest and shrub-field forage for mule deer and elk. FWP would manage public

access and recreation in keeping with traditional FWP practices on the BCWMA and in Hunting District 282. A draft management plan for the subject lands is attached in Appendix A, which more thoroughly explains FWP's proposed management direction and strategies in the event that FWP purchases the subject lands.

Under this proposal, FWP would pay no more than \$3.3 million from its Habitat Montana Program to purchase the subject lands from RMEF in June 2004. FWP expects to reimburse its Habitat Montana Program in the full amount of \$3.3 million with a grant from the federal Forest Legacy Program in 2005. FWP would assume the long-term costs of land management as part of its continuing management program for the BCWMA.

FWP applied to the Forest Legacy program for a grant of \$3.3 million to support this proposal in July 2003. In early 2004, the U. S. Forest Service ranked this proposal third in priority to receive Forest Legacy funding among all national projects. Its high national ranking places this proposal in an advantageous position to receive full funding from a federal program that has been growing steadily in its annual budgetary allocation from Congress.

### **Benefits of the Proposed Action**

The proposed action would prevent residential or commercial development on this important component of the core winter range and would protect the public's sizable investments in the BCWMA and the local deer and elk populations. This action would also preclude other plausible and potentially serious scenarios in this sensitive location where wildlife congregate, including game farms, artificial feeding and habitat degradation. Under FWP ownership, opportunities would exist to enhance important habitat features such as production of tree lichens, browse and grass forage. This proposed action would directly benefit virtually the entire elk and mule deer populations on the BCWMA (see discussion under *Wildlife* earlier in this report). These populations support about 25,000 hunter-days of public recreation annually, across the Clearwater River watershed to the upper Swan Valley, the Monture Creek drainage, and the southwest Bob Marshall Wilderness Area. This rare opportunity to obtain these benefits

has been provided through partnership with Plum Creek, TNC, RMEF, the Forest Legacy program, The Blackfoot Challenge, and local communities, which would be difficult—if not impossible—to replicate in the future if this project is not completed at this time. FWP's Habitat Montana Program would be reimbursed in full for the price of purchase with a grant from the Forest Legacy program, pending congressional action.

### **ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION**

FWP considered the alternative of taking no action regarding purchase of the subject lands. This would probably cause TNC to immediately renegotiate with Plum Creek to substitute other lands (outside the BCWMA) into the purchase agreement between the two parties. FWP anticipates that TNC would do this in order for TNC to ensure that it is repaid in full for its purchase of any Plum Creek lands, and that its purchases result in resource conservation solutions that are in keeping with local community values. TNC and RMEF will not enter into any transaction with Plum Creek on the BCWMA subject lands if there is a high likelihood that FWP will not work in good faith to acquire these lands. The no-action alternative would not allow FWP to control the course of any future property sales and commercial and residential developments within an area where such developments could negatively impact elk and mule deer populations when they occupy an important winter concentration area on and near the BCWMA. Numerous factors beyond FWP control would determine the occurrence, pace, timing and type of development. FWP would retain the option to comment to the Missoula and Powell County Commissioners on proposed land subdivisions (less than 160 acres) under existing subdivision laws, but would not control decisions. Until such time as the subject lands are sold, if ever, Plum Creek Timber Company would continue to manage forests for commercial timber production and harvest on the primary winter range for the BCWMA mule deer population and on an important component of the larger winter range for the BCWMA elk population.

FWP and Plum Creek Timber Company discussed the possibility of FWP purchasing a conservation easement on the subject lands. The intent of such an easement would be to prevent future subdivision and development of the subject lands, guarantee public access, and maintain

minimum necessary forested forage for elk and mule deer, while leaving the land in private ownership. Plum Creek declined to grant a conservation easement on the subject lands, and further discussions led to the development of the proposed action. TNC or RMEF would not enter into a conservation easement with FWP on the subject lands because FWP's easement in this important hunting area would guarantee public access in perpetuity, which TNC and RMEF fear would limit options for a rapid resale of the fee-title. Again, TNC or RMEF will avoid any transaction that might involve holding fee-title to the subject lands for more than a matter of months. Therefore, the alternative of a conservation easement is not viable and will receive no further consideration in this analysis.

At the encouragement of Plum Creek Timber Company, FWP also explored practical options for an exchange of lands that would accomplish FWP objectives on the subject lands. FWP could not identify adequate surplus lands in its ownership to trade with Plum Creek. In addition, FWP explored options for land exchanges between Plum Creek and DNRC, or Plum Creek and the Lolo National Forest, but neither DNRC nor the Lolo Forest were interested in owning all of the subject lands. Although the Lolo Forest was interested in owning the subject lands on Boyd Mountain, it expressed concern about entering into a land exchange, citing high administrative cost and a limited amount of Forest lands available for exchange. Therefore, the alternative of a land exchange to achieve FWP objectives on the subject lands is not viable and will receive no further consideration in this analysis.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND NO ACTION**

### **Threatened and Endangered Species**

The gray wolf is listed as threatened in Montana, and may be present occasionally on the subject lands. At this time, wolves have not established a consistent use pattern that includes the subject lands. The proposed action would be consistent with the goal of recovering wolf populations in northwestern Montana by protecting and potentially improving habitat for important prey species (i.e., elk and mule deer) and by contributing to the protection of a large

block of land that is uninhabited by humans. The no-action alternative would allow the possibility of future losses in habitat for prey species used by wolves and increases in potential conflicts with humans if land subdivision or related developments occur.

Bald eagles are classified as threatened in Montana. Active bald eagle nests exist along the western shore of the Clearwater River and Chain of Lakes, but none are known to occur within ½-mile of the subject lands. The proposed action would prevent increased human presence and disturbance on or originating from the subject lands that might impact nesting success of bald eagles during critical periods in the nesting season. It would protect and allow development over time of potential nest sites with a fair probability of occupancy (due to the proximity of the western Boyd Mountain lands to Salmon Lake). No-action would allow the possibility of future human activities on or originating from the subject lands (e.g., helicopter logging during nest initiation) that could impact bald eagles. FWP is an active participant in the Montana Bald Eagle Working Group, a cooperative team of representatives from federal and state agencies (including USFWS, FWP and DNRC), universities, conservation groups and private industry, which has established guidelines for landowners managing lands in active bald eagle territories. FWP will conduct management activities on the subject lands (e.g., selective timber harvest, prescribed burning, weed control) in strict compliance with the guidelines and their intent.

Grizzly bears are classified as a threatened species in Montana. Grizzly bears have been observed on the subject lands in recent years. The proposed action is consistent with the goal of recovering grizzly bear populations in Montana because it would protect the subject lands from the possibility of being subdivided and developed. No action would allow the possibility for increases in potential conflicts with humans if land subdivision or related developments occur.

Peregrine falcons are currently classified as threatened in Montana. Peregrine pairs are not known to occupy the subject lands or vicinity. However, small rock outcrops on the subject lands might be marginally suitable as habitat. The proposed action would maintain the

availability of these habitats for peregrines and other raptors, but this could not be guaranteed under no-action.

### **Sensitive Species**

The proposed action would recruit large-diameter larch, ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir, both living and dead, and retain dense thickets in patches. This would potentially enhance habitat for the sensitive species most likely to occur on the subject lands: flammulated owls, black-backed woodpeckers, pileated woodpeckers, fishers, and lynx. Habitat for northern bog lemmings potentially exists in the draw that runs along the north boundary of section 4. For all sensitive species, the proposed action would provide a measure of protection on the subject lands from habitat loss by removing the possibility of future subdivisions or other developments, but no-action could prove detrimental in the long-term by leaving that possibility open.

### **Elk and Deer Winter Range**

The no-action alternative would leave an important portion of the BCWMA core winter range and elk and deer populations vulnerable to future management decisions by private landowners, who would likely manage to achieve objectives that do not feature the general public interest in wildlife. Changes in management direction on the subject lands that would affect the core deer and elk winter range, result in displacement of deer or elk, and/or increase the conflict between private property rights and the public interest in deer or elk, would ultimately result in as much as a 90% decrease in habitat capacity for elk and mule deer on the BCWMA. The proposed action would strengthen the continuity of purpose for management of the BCWMA winter range, and would benefit elk and deer compared with no action.

### **Predators and Scavengers**

A diversity of wildlife species are associated with, and benefit from, the prey base provided by migratory herds of elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer. During winter, concentrations of elk and deer on or near the subject lands amount to a resource of prey animals numbering up to 2,500 animals annually, or somewhere on the order of 700,000 pounds of flesh,

hair, bone and minerals. Approximately 5% of this potential prey base is actually used by predators and scavengers on the BCWMA annually. This prey base also supports predator and scavenger species in more remote locations during spring, summer and fall.

Humans are the primary predators on the Blackfoot-Clearwater deer and elk populations. Mountain lion, black bear, grizzly bear, gray wolf, coyote, and golden eagle currently prey upon these deer and elk populations, and predator numbers may be expected to fluctuate with the prey. In addition, magpies, ravens, bald eagles, pine martens, gray jays, goshawks, weasels, and striped skunks feed upon carrion on or near the subject lands during winter and/or spring. Antlers and bones are food for porcupines and other rodents. When deer and elk move to summer range, they feed fisher and wolverine in addition to the predators and scavengers previously noted.

No-action would leave the core elk winter range on the BCWMA vulnerable to incompatible future management of the subject lands. A substantial future reduction in elk and deer numbers is a likely possibility under no-action, which would negatively affect--and potentially be exacerbated by--predators and scavengers. The proposed action would maintain habitat for current deer and elk levels, which would be to the benefit of predators and scavengers on the BCWMA.

### **Wetlands/Floodplains**

There is no designated floodplain affected by this proposal. Six intermittent stream courses cross the subject lands, with narrow and broken riparian zones. Because of streamside management zones described in Montana law, both the proposed action and no-action would have similar neutral effects on the immediate streamsidess within the subject lands. The proposed action would provide increased opportunity to manage forest structures and landscapes to develop broader habitats for wildlife, centered on these small watercourses.

### **Prime or Unique Farmlands**

There are no "prime or unique farmlands" or "farmlands of statewide or local importance"

on the subject lands, as designated by the Missoula County Conservation District of the U. S. Natural Resource Conservation Service. Farmlands of local importance are defined as land, in addition to prime and statewide, that could be farmed, is relatively flat (0-15 percent slopes) and currently non-forested.

### **Hunting**

FWP estimates that the BCWMA elk herd supports a hunting economy worth over \$1,000,000 annually. Based on the FWP statewide harvest survey, a conservative estimate is that 1,500 hunters spend 10,000 hunter-days annually in pursuit of elk in all or portions of HDs 281, 282, 283, 285, 130 and 150. Extrapolating from the harvest survey and elk population surveys made by FWP biologists, hunters harvest 150 bulls and 150 antlerless elk from the BCWMA elk herd annually.

Hunting and harvest statistics for deer are based on an FWP statewide survey of hunting effort and harvest in 2002. Data are reported for HDs 282 and 285, which include the BCWMA and surrounding summer-fall habitats for migratory deer in the Clearwater River drainage. These data suggest that approximately 2,700 hunters spend nearly 15,000 hunter-days annually in pursuit of deer within the yearlong range of the BCWMA deer populations. Hunters killed almost 1,000 deer in these areas in 2002, with white-tailed deer accounting for 90 percent of the deer harvest.

Potential impacts of this proposal on hunting opportunities follow those previously described under the heading of Elk and Deer Winter Range. To summarize, the no-action alternative would risk a substantial loss in elk and mule deer hunting opportunity at the BCWMA. The proposed action would benefit hunting within the ranges of the BCWMA elk and mule deer populations by securing favorable, long-term management of an important unit of winter range.

### **Forest management**

Under the proposed action, FWP would incorporate the subject lands into its cooperative Management Plan with DNRC, which guides a program of cooperative forest management across FWP and DNRC lands within the BCWMA. This cooperative approach to forest management, for the intended benefit of forest resources, wildlife habitat, and State Trust beneficiaries, was previously explained and analyzed in an Environmental Impact Statement that was jointly released to the public by FWP and DNRC in February 2001 (Record of Decision in May 2001), and a subsequent Environmental Assessment in December 2003 (ROD January 2004). Under this cooperative management program, FWP retains total and complete control of any decisions about timber management on FWP property. FWP's forest management strategy on the subject lands would be to speed forest regeneration and avoid further short-term losses of forested forage and effective cover. FWP has no immediate plans for harvesting timber on the subject lands, but recognizes the potential for using carefully prescribed, silvicultural treatments to manipulate habitats to achieve wildlife objectives. In particular, silvicultural treatments may be useful to fine-tune habitat features within and around blocks of cover to address the needs of diverse wildlife communities, in addition to providing critical winter range for deer and elk. Any proposal for using commercial or precommercial timber harvests to accomplish these objectives on the subject lands would be thoroughly described and analyzed in an environmental review process with public participation (i.e., MEPA). Under the no-action alternative in the foreseeable future, Plum Creek Timber Company would continue to manage the forested landscape for the commercial production and harvest of timber.

### **Public access**

The subject lands lie within the current boundaries of the BCWMA and FWP Hunting District (HD 282). Under the proposed action, all BCWMA lands within HD 282, including the subject lands, would continue to be closed to all public entry from November 11 through May 14 each year to minimize disturbances to wintering wildlife and prevent animals from being displaced from preferred foraging areas. All BCWMA lands would continue to be opened for public entry on May 15, subject to standard regulations. Main access roads across the subject

lands would be open to motorized travel by the public from May 15 through November 10. Spur roads would remain closed to motorized vehicles. A copy of the current travel plan for the BCWMA is attached with the draft Management Plan in Appendix A.

### **Livestock grazing**

Generally, grazing opportunities and values for livestock are poor on the subject lands, due to steep slopes and forested cover. Grazing rights on the subject lands have been leased to FWP since 1948. FWP has never grazed livestock on the subject lands; instead the grazing lease has been used to exclude livestock and reserve forage for wintering elk and deer. Under the proposed action, FWP would obtain ownership of the subject lands and would continue to exclude livestock. No-action would leave the option open for a future lessee or landowner to graze livestock. The most likely scenario for future livestock grazing under no-action would be grazing by horses, llamas or other riding or pack animals that might be kept at a private residence or hobby ranch. Such grazing often is confined and concentrated on small acreages (pastures), resulting in damage to soil and vegetation. Under the no-action alternative, FWP would expect to continue paying an annual lease fee to Plum Creek Timber Company or successors in interest for as long as the lease was offered.

### **Air and Water Quality**

The proposed action would likely result in a net reduction in potential future risks to air and water quality on the subject lands, compared to no action. Possibilities for residential, commercial and industrial developments would be reduced or eliminated across the subject lands. Under the proposed action, FWP would expect to use prescribed fire to stimulate understory forage production and quality on an occasional basis (e.g., during a 5-day period every decade), and slash burning may be required after occasional logging treatments (e.g., one occurrence per decade). Overall, impacts to air quality of burning events on the subject lands would probably not exceed, and would more likely be less than, the impacts that would occur under continued ownership by corporate timber managers. Under FWP ownership, burning would be in compliance with state airshed management directives, in consultation with DNRC.

The potential for impacts to water quality exist along intermittent streams during spring runoff. Under the proposed action, FWP would minimize activities that would disturb slopes, and would ensure effective road drainage, maintain or improve vegetation establishment on cutslopes, and take other measures as needed to further stabilize slopes above watercourses. The potential for water quality impacts would be less under the proposed action than if vehicle traffic and other human activities increased as a result of residential or commercial developments on the subject lands in the future. Under FWP's cooperative Management Plan with DNRC (to be enacted in spring 2004), the two state agencies will work together in the future to manage the BCWMA road system, with highest priority awarded to any needs for meeting Best Management Practices. FWP would include the subject lands in its consideration of future needs for remedial work to comply with Best Management Practices.

### **Historic and Cultural Resources**

FWP must provide the protections and considerations offered under the Montana Antiquities Act for historic and cultural resources recorded on lands owned by FWP. No sites of historic or cultural importance are known to exist on the subject lands, but a determination would be required from a qualified archaeologist if FWP proposed to engage in management activities that would impact previously undisturbed sites. At this time, such protections are not afforded historic and cultural resources on the subject lands while they remain in private ownership.

### **Impacts on Economies and Communities**

Potential economic and human social impacts are addressed in the attached socio-economic assessment (Appendix B). There would be no effect on the tax base of Missoula and Powell Counties because FWP makes annual payments to the counties in amounts equal to the property tax assessments on lands in its ownership.

### **Cumulative Impacts**

No-action could ultimately contribute to the cumulative regional and local loss of wildlife

habitat in general, and deer and elk winter range in particular, if the subject lands are managed in a manner incompatible with the requirements of elk and mule deer for winter habitat. Elk, in particular, would not be welcomed by adjoining private ranchers in the numbers that they currently exist on the BCWMA, nor in numbers that might have occurred in suitable winter habitat on private lands before European settlement. Elk in excessive numbers cause substantial damage to fences and crops, and can otherwise conflict with livestock operations. Relatively minor future losses in habitat or habitat security on the BCWMA subject lands would contribute to a larger cumulative loss of winter habitat for the BCWMA elk population, considering social constraints on winter elk distribution in modern times. Conversely, the proposed action would not be expected to contribute to a cumulative impact in a measurable way and would preserve core and remnant winter habitats for deer and elk.

### **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Members of the BCWMA Citizens Advisory Council, Five Valleys Land Trust, and the Blackfoot-Clearwater Chapter of the RMEF helped FWP identify issues and strategies in spring 1998 that ultimately led to development of this proposal. FWP has consulted with potentially affected agencies and neighbors, including Plum Creek, DNRC, Lolo National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, and the Blackfoot Challenge in the origination of this proposal. FWP has collaborated closely with TNC, the Blackfoot Challenge, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to develop this proposal. The Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission has toured the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Project area and heard 3 informational presentations on the progress and direction of the proposal since September 1998. FWP has held 3 public hearings in Seeley Lake and conducted 3 public involvement processes under MEPA pertaining to the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Project since 1999. Progress on the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Project has also been published periodically in FWP's "Game Range Ramblings" column in the *Seeley-Swan Pathfinder* newspaper.

Formal public participation specific to FWP's proposed purchase of approximately 3,834 acres from RMEF will begin with the availability of this draft environmental assessment (EA) for

public review and comment. The availability of this EA for public review will be advertised in the local, Missoula-area, and statewide media, and a copy of the draft EA will be mailed to all parties who indicate an interest in this proposal. The public review period will be from April 15 through May 14, 2004. A public hearing will be held at the Seeley Lake Community Center on April 28, 2004 at 7:00 P.M. After reviewing public input, FWP will revise and finalize the draft EA and prepare a record of decision. The Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission and the Land Board will be asked to render a final decision on this proposal at the regularly scheduled meeting of each body in June 2004, based upon a thorough review of public comment.

Comments should be addressed to Mike Thompson; Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; 3201 Spurgin Road; Missoula, MT 59804 (phone 406-542-5523; email [mthompson@state.mt.us](mailto:mthompson@state.mt.us)). Comments must be postmarked no later than May 14, 2004 to ensure their consideration in the decision-making process.

#### **NEED FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT**

Based on an evaluation that the proposed action will not have a significant impact on the physical and human environment, under MEPA, the proposed action is not a significant action affecting the physical and human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not a necessary level of review.

# **A p p e n d i x A**

**Draft Management Plan**

# **DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN**

## **Boyd and Sperry Mountains**

### **(Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area)**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) proposes to purchase fee-title ownership of approximately 3,834 acres within the outer administrative boundary of the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA). As explained in the preceding environmental assessment, these lands on Boyd and Sperry Mountains have been managed by corporate interests for many years, most recently under the ownership of Plum Creek Timber Company, L.P. If FWP acquires the subject lands, FWP would manage these lands for the benefit of wildlife, in a manner consistent with established management objectives and practices on other lands deeded to FWP within the BCWMA.

This draft management plan outlines FWP's strategies for meeting the obligations it would accept as part of the cost of acquiring the subject lands. After revising this draft plan to reflect public review and comment, the final version will serve as an amendment to the existing comprehensive management plan for the BCWMA (revised 1989).

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#### **AREA DESCRIPTION**

##### **Location:**

This proposal involves approximately 3,834 acres of land, which lies on the top and north slopes of Boyd Mountain, and the east slope of Sperry Mountain, generally within an area bounded by Highway 200 (south), Highway 83 (west), and Woodworth Road (north and east) (Figure 1).

##### **Ownership:**

Plum Creek acquired the subject lands on November 1, 1993, as part of its purchase of 867,000 acres of Montana timberlands from Champion International Corporation. The lands were owned by the Anaconda Company at the time the BCWMA was established, and Champion purchased them from the Anaconda Company in 1972. FWP has leased grazing rights on these lands since 1948, and the landowners generally have cooperated in allowing and managing public access in a manner compatible with BCWMA objectives. The subject lands are bordered by other lands owned by FWP, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), and the U. S. Bureau of Land Management (all included within the BCWMA). A relatively small proportion of the subject lands boundary abuts private property near lower Cottonwood Creek, and near Tote Road Lake.

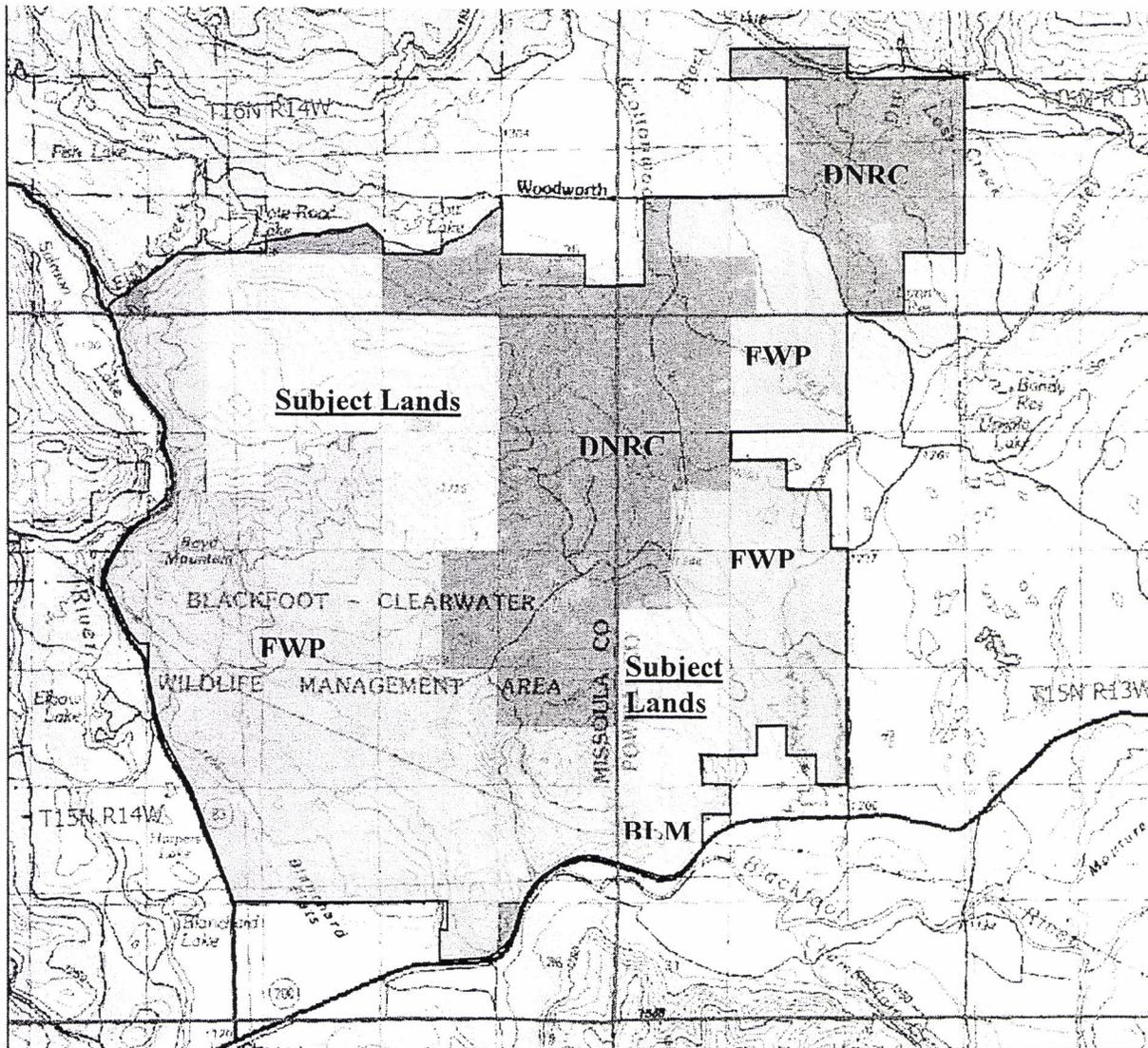


Figure 1. Location of the subject lands in relation to other ownership within the BCWMA.

**Landscape/Improvements:**

The subject lands are steep sloping and dissected by intermittent streams, resulting in a variety of aspects and a scattered distribution of numerous benches, small plateaus and rock outcrops. The highest elevation on the subject lands is about 5,400 feet, on top of Boyd Mountain.

The landscape on Boyd Mountain has supported dense, mature forests of Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine in recent years, with overstory canopy coverage averaging more than 50%. Overstory canopy was selectively reduced in a series of commercial timber harvests in the mid-1990s until 2003 on Boyd Mountain. The portion of the subject lands on Sperry Mountain burned in the mid-1960s, and again in 1991, resulting in open shrub-fields. A network of unsurfaced logging roads has been maintained and improved, which provides access by four-wheel drive vehicle to virtually every timber stand on the property, except on the steepest slopes.

A vehicular access point from Highway 83 is located just south of mile marker 7, across from Salmon Lake State Park. Vehicular access from Highway 200 is located about 1.5 miles north on Woodworth Road, at the turn-off to the BCWMA seasonal headquarters. There are no buildings or similar structures on the subject lands.

### Wildlife

The occurrence of nearly 200 wildlife species has been documented on the BCWMA in the 1990s (checklist attached). Approximately 115 of these species may be expected to occur in forested habitats on the subject lands.

Use of the subject lands in winter by white-tailed deer, mule deer and elk was intensively studied from 1991-1997 as part of a larger research effort on the BCWMA by G. Ross Baty, under the direction of Dr. C. Les Marcum (University of Montana, Missoula), in cooperation with FWP. The work was funded by the McIntire-Stennis Federal Forestry Program, Lolo National Forest, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and FWP. Original references for the results summarized in this document are listed below, and are available for inspection at FWP's Region 2 office in Missoula:

Baty, G. R., C. L. Marcum, and M. J. Thompson. 1993. Observations of elk and deer competition and commensalism on a western Montana winter range. Pages 58-62 in J. D. Cada, J. G. Peterson, and T. N. Lonner, comps., Proc. Western States and Prov. Elk Workshop, Mont. Dept. of Fish, Wildl. and Parks, Bozeman. 72 pp.

Baty, G. R. 1995. Resource partitioning and browse use by sympatric elk, mule deer and whitetailed deer on a winter range in western Montana. M.S. Thesis, Univ. Montana, Missoula. 228 pp.

Baty, G. R., C. L. Marcum, M. J. Thompson, and J. M. Hillis. 1996. Potential effects of ecosystem management on cervids wintering in ponderosa pine habitats. *Intermountain Journal of Sciences*, 2(1):17.

Dickson, D. 1997. Contractor's report on field work completed February 1-19, 1997. FWP, Missoula.

Data from Baty (1995) and Dickson (1997) support the conclusion that the subject lands form an important component of the BCWMA winter range for elk and mule deer. Under average winter conditions in January-February 1992-1993, 12.1-16.8% of elk tracks counted on the BCWMA were in Baty's Spatial Unit 4, which is the spatial unit that best corresponds with the subject lands on Boyd Mountain. Under prolonged conditions of unusually deep, crusted snow in February 1997, Dickson (1997) found 39.8% of all BCWMA elk tracks in Spatial Unit 4. Under average winter conditions in January-February 1992-1993, 18.8-21.9% of mule deer tracks and 11.8-19.7% of white-tailed deer tracks counted on the BCWMA were in Spatial Unit 4. Under prolonged conditions of unusually deep, crusted snow in February 1997, Dickson (1997) found 36.5% and 6% of all BCWMA mule deer and white-tailed deer tracks in Spatial Unit 4. These data support the analysis presented by Baty et al. (1996) that documented the high value of forested winter habitat for mule deer on the BCWMA. On the surface, Dickson's (1997) report of lowered white-tailed deer use in Spatial Unit 4 during a severe winter would seem to conflict with the apparent dependence of white-tailed deer on connected forest canopies as a component of winter habitat (Baty et al. 1996). However, Baty (1995) explained this previously by documenting the strong affinity of white-tailed deer for a particular forested habitat unit on the

western edge of the BCWMA, along the Clearwater River, especially as snow depths accumulate. Therefore, it may be concluded that the subject lands are an important component of winter habitat on the BCWMA for both deer species during most winters, and become increasingly important for mule deer, but less so for white-tailed deer, under severe winter conditions.

Under average winter conditions in January-February 1992-1993, 34.3-42.6% of elk tracks counted on the BCWMA were in Baty's Spatial Unit 3, which is the spatial unit that best corresponds with the subject lands on Sperry Mountain. Under prolonged conditions of unusually deep, crusted snow in February 1997, Dickson (1997) found 48.6% of all BCWMA elk tracks in Spatial Unit 3. The data that were obtained in 1997 were during a period when elk were completely confined by exceptional snow depths to the forested portions of the ground survey units; thus, elk distribution in 1997 probably poorly fits the specific location of the nonforested subject lands on Sperry Mountain. Under average winter conditions in January-February 1992-1993, 70.5-78.2% of mule deer tracks and 0.9-8.4% of white-tailed deer tracks counted on the BCWMA were in Baty's Spatial Unit 3. A large proportion of mule deer tracks were in the Sperry Grade burn, in habitats characteristic of the subject lands. Under prolonged conditions of unusually deep, crusted snow in February 1997, deer of both species abandoned the burn almost completely (Dickson 1997), but 62.5% and 6.0% of all BCWMA mule deer and white-tailed deer tracks used adjacent forest habitats in Spatial Unit 3. These data support the analysis presented by Baty et al. (1996) that documented the high value of forested winter habitat for mule deer on the BCWMA.

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## **MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

The subject lands would be managed in a manner consistent with direction provided in the BCWMA comprehensive management plan (revised 1989), noxious weed management plan (1992), plan for entering into cooperative management agreements with private landowners (i.e., livestock grazing, 1996), management plan for the West Slope of Boyd Mountain (856 acres purchased from Plum Creek, 1999), and management plan for the Blackfoot-Clearwater Conservation Easement with DNRC (6,850 acres, 2004). Compared to the current situation, with the subject lands under Plum Creek ownership and FWP lease, there would be little or no change in the management of public access and livestock grazing. Compared with current conditions, efforts to control noxious weeds would increase on roadsides and in key, nonforested foraging areas for deer and elk. Forest management would shift from an emphasis on commercial timber production to an emphasis on providing forested forage and cover for wintering mule deer and elk.

### **Objectives (from BCWMA Management Plan)**

**I:** Manage for the maximum sustainable utilization of the winter range by elk, mule deer and white-tailed deer within the following standards:

- Soil condition and development will be maintained or enhanced;
- Adverse impacts to adjacent landowners will be reduced or mitigated;
- The condition of elk and deer populations will be maintained or enhanced;

- Elk and deer populations will be supported by natural winter forage;
- Adverse impacts on other resources such as fisheries, riparian habitats, water quality, native plant communities, and other animal populations will be avoided or mitigated. Opportunities to enhance these resources will be pursued when compatible with elk and deer management (as time and funding allow).

**II:** Maximize public access and recreation opportunities within the following standards:

- Other WMA objectives (i.e., wildlife) will not be compromised;
- Diverse opportunities for appreciation and enjoyment by the public will be maintained. Recreation opportunities include hunting, fishing, trapping, touring, camping, picnicking, hiking, bike-riding and horseback riding.

**Public Access:**

The subject lands lie within the current boundaries of FWP Hunting District (HD) 282 and the BCWMA. All BCWMA lands within HD 282, including the subject lands, would continue to be closed to all public entry from November 11 through May 14 each year to minimize disturbances to wintering wildlife and prevent animals from being displaced from preferred foraging areas (see attached travel plan). All BCWMA lands would continue to be opened for public entry on May 15, subject to the following standard regulations:

- During the period when the BCWMA is open to the public (May 15-November 10), motorized vehicles may be operated on established roads that are not gated and locked, or not posted closed.
- Motorized vehicles are prohibited off established roads or on roads that are gated and locked, or posted closed. Mountain bicycles stay on established roads (allowed on closed roads, unless posted otherwise).
- Overnight camping is allowed during the period when the BCWMA is open to the public. Camps may be maintained on the BCWMA for a maximum of 14 days in any 30-day period. Motorized camping vehicles are prohibited from leaving road shoulders or established pullouts.
- Do not block roads or gates.
- No removal of firewood from the BCWMA.
- Permits required for groups of over 30 people.
- Leave no trace of campfires, hitching rails, shooting targets or other litter.

Hunting District 282 requires special hunting regulations because large numbers of elk and deer begin to concentrate on the BCWMA winter range during hunting season. A synopsis of current regulations follows, which already apply to the subject lands in HD 282:

- Rifle hunting for deer or elk is by permit only, beginning for deer B-tag holders on the Saturday that occurs 8 days before the opening of the general big-game hunting season. Non-permit holders may accompany permitted hunters, but may not hunt deer or elk in HD 282 during the rifle season.
- Archery-only season for deer or elk closes 2 days earlier in HD 282 than in surrounding districts to correspond with the opening of the permit-only deer season for hunters with rifles. No special permit is required to hunt deer or elk in the archery-only season.
- Deer and elk hunting seasons close on or before November 10 each year, which corresponds with the annual winter closure of the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (WMA) to all public entry. Hunting seasons for black bear and upland birds are open in HD 282 beyond Nov. 10, but access is allowed (with landowner permission) only on lands outside the WMA boundary.
- HD 282 is open to general license holders for hunting upland birds, waterfowl and black bear, beginning on the regularly scheduled opening days through November 10.
- HD 282 is closed to mountain lion hunting.

**Livestock grazing:**

FWP has leased livestock grazing rights on the subject lands since 1948, and has excluded livestock, choosing instead to reserve all forage production for wintering wildlife. Although FWP does allow cattle to graze selected lands within the BCWMA under cooperative management agreements with neighboring landowners, the subject lands are poorly suited for livestock. Steep slopes would impede cattle movement, and there is low potential for producing palatable livestock forage on these forested lands. Under such circumstances, livestock may compete with elk and deer for available forage. Therefore, FWP would continue to exclude livestock from the subject lands.

**Noxious Weed Control:**

Spotted knapweed is the most obvious noxious weed on the subject lands, and is distributed along the road system and on steep, open slopes. Other noxious weeds are thought to be absent or occur in low densities with limited distributions on the subject lands, but this is speculative in advance of a complete site inventory. FWP's program to control noxious weeds would be consistent with the approach described in the Noxious Weed Management Plan for the BCWMA (1992), and would include measures to prevent weed establishment and spread, as well as chemical and biological control of established infestations.

FWP's first priority will be to document and map all noxious weed occurrences on the subject lands during the first growing season under FWP ownership. Any isolated patches of leafy spurge, Dalmatian toadflax or other early invading species will be eradicated by the most efficient and effective means (e.g., hand-pulling, digging or herbicide spot treatment), depending

on weed species and site limitations. Roadsides will be inspected annually for the purpose of detecting and eradicating any new weed introductions before infestations become established. A strategy will be developed to contain and control the spread of established infestations that are identified in the initial mapping effort, which would probably involve integrated application of chemical and biological controls.

FWP's first priority for herbicide control of spotted knapweed on the subject lands will be to spray roadsides. The first treatment would be planned for spring 2005, and would be accomplished by truck, tractor or ATV. FWP would anticipate using Tordon herbicide (1 pint per acre), based on considerations of human safety, environmental risk, effectiveness in controlling spotted knapweed and cost-effectiveness. Treatments would occur at 3-year intervals on the average along roadsides. Considerations for managing risks of public contact with herbicide residues and other environmental issues are addressed in the Noxious Weed Management Plan for the BCWMA (1992).

Roadside spraying and annual inspections (with spot eradications) are important strategies to prevent new weed establishments and spread. As an additional preventive measure, FWP will confine motorized traffic to a single open road system, and will otherwise avoid disturbance of the soil surface. FWP's habitat priority for the subject lands is to enhance forested forage to improve winter range for elk and mule deer; habitat suitability for establishment of spotted knapweed, sulphur cinquefoil and other noxious weeds will decline as previously harvested forest canopies thicken and expand. FWP will consider opportunities to control spotted knapweed in grassland openings to improve forage for elk and deer as funding and other weed control priorities allow.

#### **Forest Management:**

As mentioned above, FWP's habitat priority for the subject lands is to enhance forested forage and cover to improve winter range for elk and mule deer. Plum Creek extensively harvested forests on Boyd Mountain in the mid-1990s to early 2000s. FWP will direct forest management activities toward the recovery and recruitment of forage and cover in the form of large trees, grading in increasing density from ridgetop parks to spruce draws. Efforts may be made to speed regeneration rates by planting trees on selected sites, depending on more detailed assessments of feasibility that would occur within the first two years after FWP assumed ownership of the subject lands.

Timber harvests in the next 20 years will be limited only to prescribed treatments that would enhance growth rates and recruitment of old ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and larch on appropriate sites, leaving narrow and irregular spacings between trees closer to draws to eventually achieve connected canopies and thickets. Prescribed timber harvests might also be appropriate on some sites to manage the risk of losing a high proportion of recruited cover to stand replacement fire in the future. Consideration would also be given to the potential benefits of prescribed timber harvests to enhance the production of hanging tree lichen and other important winter forage species for white-tailed deer and elk. Under all potential prescriptions, large-diameter dead trees (standing and down) would be left as habitat for woodpeckers, marten,

flying squirrels and other species (firewood cutting would be prohibited).

Forest habitat types on Sperry Mountain burned in the mid-1960s, and again in 1991. These were stand-replacement fires, and most of the subject lands on Sperry Mountain currently do not support a forest canopy. The portion of this winter range on the northeast-facing slope of Sperry Mountain would benefit from a restored forest canopy to ameliorate snow conditions for mule deer and elk. Plum Creek replanted much of this slope in the late 1990s and seedlings are now growing and well distributed. The south-facing slopes of the subject lands on Sperry Mountain support a grass and browse forage-base for mule deer and elk. Trees have not been replanted here, and natural regeneration is sparse to absent. FWP would continue to manage for an open, browse-dominated, vegetation type on this dry, south-facing landform, where mule deer congregate in the hundreds during winter.

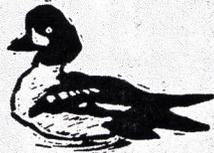
FWP and DNRC plan to cooperate in a program of forest management that is coordinated across FWP lands and DNRC lands on the BCWMA. This pertains to lands previously described under the Phase II Land Exchanges EIS (DNRC/FWP, February 2001) and the draft Management Plan for the proposed Blackfoot-Clearwater Conservation Easement (DNRC/FWP, December 2003). Its purpose is to improve management efficiency and effectiveness by adopting a common, cooperative approach to the management of forests, rangelands, wetlands, noxious weeds and recreation across the subject lands; and to further develop and refine this cooperative management approach to achieve these objectives for as long as the interests of the Trusts and public are served. Land management objectives include: (a) perpetuate and enhance wildlife habitat, particularly elk and deer winter habitat; (b) maintain or restore natural forest systems and enhance timber production; (c) ensure that DNRC lands subject to this agreement generate revenues in amounts equal to or greater than other comparable DNRC lands; (d) perpetuate public recreational opportunities. FWP would include the subject lands for management consideration under this pre-existing cooperative forest-management plan with DNRC, which would serve as the primary means for FWP to accomplish forest management on the subject lands. Under this cooperative management plan, FWP retains total and complete control of any decisions regarding forest management on land in its ownership. FWP expects to prescribe little or no forest management on the subject lands in the near future. Any proposal for using commercial or precommercial timber harvests to accomplish FWP objectives on the subject lands would be thoroughly described and analyzed in an environmental review process with public participation (i.e., MEPA).

**Prescribed Burning:**

Lightning and human-caused fires played a role in shaping wildlife habitats on the subject lands historically. The probability of human-caused fire is increased by the proximity of the subject lands to heavily traveled state highways, county roads, and an interior open-road network for public recreation. Prescribed understory burning may be used in conjunction with silvicultural treatments to stimulate browse production and manage fine fuels for the purpose of limiting the intensity of wildfires and retaining desirable forest structures. However, the BCWMA is an island among private lands and residences. Prescribed fire, other than the routine burning of slash piles or "jackpot burns," would require consent from potentially affected neighbors, as well

as coordination with local fire management agencies. Such projects would likely occur uncommonly (e.g., 1 per 10 years), and would most likely occur in cooperation with a neighbor who might want to treat adjacent private or public lands in a similar manner.

# Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area Checklist



## Abbreviations

### Breeding/Wintering Status

- B - Direct evidence of breeding (nest or dependent young)
- b - Indirect or circumstantial evidence of breeding
- t - Observed, no evidence of breeding
- W - Overwintering, regular sightings during winter period
- w - Overwintering not documented, species observed at least once between Dec. 15 and Feb. 15

### Relative Abundance

- a - Abundant: a species which is very numerous
- c - Common: likely to be seen or heard in suitable habitat
- o - Occasional: seen a few times during a season
- u - Uncommon: present, but not certain to be seen
- r - Rarely seen

### Season

- s - Spring (March - May)
- S - Summer (June - August)
- F - Fall (September - November)
- W - Winter (December - February)

### Habitat

- f - Forested
- b - Burned forest (Oct. 91 burn)
- p - Riparian: pond, lake or stream
- r - River (Blackfoot or Clearwater)
- g - Grassland

Special thanks to Montana State Parks and Wildlife Interpretive Association for their help in funding this brochure.

✓ Species	Breeding Status	Season - Abundance				Habitat
		s	S	F	W	
<b>Loon - Grebe</b>						
Common Loon	t	u	u	u		p
Pied-billed Grebe	t	o	o	o		p
Red-necked Grebe	b	c	c	u		p
<b>Cormorant</b>						
Double-crested Cormorant	t	u	u	u		p
<b>Bittern - Heron</b>						
Great Blue Heron	t	c	c	c	u	pr
<b>Swan - Grease - Ducks</b>						
Tundra Swan	t	u		u		p
Canada Goose	B	c	c	c		g p r
Snow Goose	t	u		u		p
Wood Duck	B	u	u	u		pr
Green-winged Teal	B	c	c	c		p
Mallard	B	c	c	c	o	pr
Northern Pintail	t	c	c	o		p
Blue-winged Teal	B	c	c	u		p
Cinnamon Teal	B	c	c	u		p
Northern Shoveller	t	o	o	u		p
Gadwall	t	u	r	r		p
Eurasian Wigeon	t	r				p
American Wigeon	B	a	c	c		p
Redhead	t	u	r	r		p
Ring-necked Duck	t	u	u	r		p
Lesser Scaup	B	c	c	o		p
Common Goldeneye	t	o	u	r		p
Barrow's Goldeneye	B	c	c	o		p
Bufflehead	t	u	u	u		p
Hooded Merganser	t	u	u	r		p
Common Merganser	B	c	c	c		pr
Ruddy Duck	t	u	u	o		p
<b>Vulture</b>						
Turkey Vulture	t	o	u	o		g f
<b>Osprey - Eagles - Hawks</b>						
Osprey	B	c	c	o		pr
Bald Eagle	BW	u	r	u	c	pr
Northern Harrier	t	c	c	c	r	g
Sharp-shinned Hawk	tw	o	o	o	o	bf
Cooper's Hawk	t	u	u			f
Northern Goshawk	b	r		r		fg
Red-tailed Hawk	Bw	c	c	c	r	fg
Rough-legged Hawk	tW	u		u	c	g
Golden Eagle	t	o	o	o	c	g
American Kestrel	B	c	c	c		g
Merlin	t	o	o	r		g

✓ Species	Breeding Status	Season - Abundance				Habitat
		s	S	F	W	

Partridge - Grouse							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Blue Grouse	B	c	c	c	u	f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spruce Grouse	B	u	u	u		f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ruffed Grouse	B	c	u	u	u	f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gray Partridge	t	u	u	u		g

Rails							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Virginia Rail	t	u	u	u		p
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sora	t	u	u	u		p
<input type="checkbox"/>	American Coot	B	a	a	c		p

Crane							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sandhill Crane	B	u	o	o		gp

Plovers - Avocet							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Semipalmated Plover	t	o		o		p
<input type="checkbox"/>	Killdeer	Bw	a	a	a	o	gp
<input type="checkbox"/>	American Avocet	t	u		o		p

Sandpipers							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lesser Yellowlegs	t	o		r		p
<input type="checkbox"/>	Willet	t	o				p
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spotted Sandpiper	b	u	u	u		pr
<input type="checkbox"/>	Long-billed Curlew	B	u	o			g
<input type="checkbox"/>	Long-billed Dowitcher	t	u	u			p

Snipe - Phalarope							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Common Snipe	b	u	u	o		gp
<input type="checkbox"/>	Wilson's Phalarope	B	u	u			gp

Gull - Terns							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ring-billed Gull	t	r		r		p
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black Tern	t	u	u	o		p
<input type="checkbox"/>	Common Tern	t		o			p

Doves							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rock Dove	t	r	r	r		fg
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mourning Dove	t	u	u	u		fg

Owls - Nightjar							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Great Horned Owl	Bw	u	u	u	u	f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Great Gray Owl	BW	u	u	u	u	f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Long-eared Owl	t	u	r	r		f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Short-eared Owl	t	r	r			g
<input type="checkbox"/>	Northern Pygmy Owl	tw	r	r		r	f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Northern Saw-whet Owl	tw	r	r		r	f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Barred Owl	tw	r			r	f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Common Nighthawk	B	u	c	c		f

✓ Species	Breeding Status	Season - Abundance				Habitat
		s	S	F	W	

Swifts							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Vaux's Swift	t			r		g
<input type="checkbox"/>	White-throated Swift	t			r		g

Hummingbirds							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rufous Hummingbird	t	o		u		fg
<input type="checkbox"/>	Calliope Hummingbird	t	u		u		f

Kingfisher							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Belted Kingfisher	b	u	u	u		pr

Woodpeckers							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Red-naped Sapsucker	B	c	c	c		fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Williamson's Sapsucker	B	u	u			f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Downy Woodpecker	BW	c	c	c	c	fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hairy Woodpecker	BW	c	c	c	c	fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Three-toed Woodpecker	BW	u	u	u	u	b
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black-backed Woodpecker	Bw	u	u	u	u	b
<input type="checkbox"/>	Northern Flicker	Bw	a	a	c	u	fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Lewis' Woodpecker	B	u	u	u		fbr
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pileated Woodpecker	t	u	u	u		fb

Flycatchers							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Olive-sided Flycatcher	b	u	u	u		f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Western Wood-pewee	b	u	u	u		f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Willow Flycatcher	b	u	u	u		f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dusky Flycatcher	t	o	o			f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Western Kingbird	t	u	u	u		fg
<input type="checkbox"/>	Eastern Kingbird	b	c	c	u		fg

Lark							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Horned Lark	tw			r		g

Swallows							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tree Swallow	B	c	c	u		fg
<input type="checkbox"/>	Violet-green Swallow	t	u	u			fp
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bank Swallow	t	u	o	o		rp
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cliff Swallow	B	c	c	c		fp
<input type="checkbox"/>	Barn Swallow	B	c	c	u		fp

Jays - Crow - Raven							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gray Jay	tw	c		u	c	f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Steller's Jay	tw	u		u	c	f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clark's Nutcracker	tw	u		u	c	f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black-billed Magpie	BW	a	a	a	a	bfgp
<input type="checkbox"/>	American Crow	tw	c	u	c	o	fg
<input type="checkbox"/>	Common Raven	bW	c	c	c	c	fgb

Mammal, amphibian, and reptile species observed  
on the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area

### Mammals

- Badger
- Bat (likely Little Brown—unconfirmed)
- Beaver
- Black Bear
- Bobcat \*
- Bushy-tailed Woodrat \*
- Columbian Ground Squirrel
- Coyote
- Deer Mouse
- Elk
- Grizzly Bear
- House Mouse
- Long-tailed Weasel
- Lynx \*
- Meadow Vole
- Mink \*
- Mountain Lion
- Mule Deer
- Muskrat
- Northern Flying Squirrel
- Nuttall's (Mountain) Cottontail
- Pine Marten \*
- Porcupine
- Raccoon
- Red Fox
- Red Squirrel
- Snowshoe Hare
- Striped Skunk
- Water Shrew
- Western Chipmunk
- White-tailed Deer
- Yellow-bellied Marmot

Other possible mammals that might reside or occur occasionally on the BCWMA:  
River Otter, Wolverine, Vagrant Shrew, Ermine, and Gray Wolf.

\* — presence identified by sign or tracks only

### Amphibians

- Spotted Frog
- Long-toed Salamander
- Rocky Mountain Toad

### Reptiles

- Western Painted Turtle
- Rubber Boa
- Garter Snake

## Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area



The Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA) was purchased in 1948 to provide winter range for elk and deer. The elk herd has increased from 200 to about 1,000 elk. The BCWMA, forty miles east of Missoula, is also winter range for approximately 1,000 mule deer and 1,000 white-tailed deer.

The BCWMA consists of a diverse blend of habitats: coniferous forests, irrigated hayfields, native bunchgrass communities, lush river and creek bottoms, ponds, and due to a large wildfire in October 1991, areas of burned standing timber.

A census was started in 1991 to record all species of birds and mammals within the BCWMA plus adjoining areas including Upsata Lake and some private ranchland. This census is a continuing effort. Any new sightings, sightings of any rare or occasional species, and any sightings that upgrade the breeding or overwintering status of listed birds will be incorporated in future editions of this pamphlet.

The BCWMA is an excellent area to view wildlife. Although this WMA is closed to the public from November 15 to May 15, one can often see wintering elk near Clearwater Junction on Highway 200 or Highway 83. The best time to look for elk is at dawn or dusk from December to March, or right along Hwy. 83 on moonlit nights throughout the winter. Remember always to view wildlife from a respectful distance.

✓ Species	Breeding Status	Season - Abundance				Habitat
		s	S	F	W	

Chickadees - Nuthatches							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black-capped Chickadee	BW	a	a	a	c	fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mountain Chickadee	BW	a	c	a	a	fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Red-breasted Nuthatch	BW	c	c	c	c	fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	White-breasted Nuthatch	BW	u	u	u	u	fb

Wrens							
<input type="checkbox"/>	House Wren	B	u	u	u		fg
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rock Wren	t	u	u	u		f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Marsh Wren	t	u	u	u		p

Dipper							
<input type="checkbox"/>	American Dipper	t	u	u	u		pr

Kinglets							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Golden-crowned Kinglet	b	u	u	u		fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	b	u	u	u		fb

Bluebirds - Thrushes							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Western Bluebird	B	u	u			fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Mountain Bluebird	B	c	c	u		fbgp
<input type="checkbox"/>	Townsend's Solitaire	t	u	u	u		fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Veery	t	u	u			fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hermit Thrush	t	u	u			fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	American Robin	B	a	a	a		fbg
<input type="checkbox"/>	Varied Thrush	b	u	u			f

Waxwings							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bohemian Waxwing	t	o		o		fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cedar Waxwing	t	o	o	o		f

Shrikes							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Northern Shrike	tw	u	o	u	r	g
<input type="checkbox"/>	Loggerhead Shrike	t	r				g

Starling							
<input type="checkbox"/>	European Starling	B	c	c	c		fbg

Vireos							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Warbling Vireo	b	u	u			f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Red-eyed Vireo	b	u	u			f

Warblers							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Orange-crowned Warbler	t	r				f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yellow Warbler	b	c	u	u		fbp
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yellow-rumped Warbler	b	c	c	c		fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Northern Waterthrush	t	o	o			p
<input type="checkbox"/>	Common Yellowthroat	b	u	o			p
<input type="checkbox"/>	American Redstart	b	u	u	u		pf

✓ Species	Breeding Status	Season - Abundance				Habitat
		s	S	F	W	

Grosbeak - Tanager - Towhee							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black-headed Grosbeak	t	o	o			f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Western Tanager	b	u	u	o		f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Rufous-sided Towhee	b	u	u	o		pf

Sparrows							
<input type="checkbox"/>	American Tree Sparrow	tw	u		r	c	fg
<input type="checkbox"/>	Chipping Sparrow	b	a	a	c		fg
<input type="checkbox"/>	Vesper Sparrow	B	a	a	c		g
<input type="checkbox"/>	Savannah Sparrow	t	u	u	u		g
<input type="checkbox"/>	Song Sparrow	b	u	u	u		fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	White-crowned Sparrow	t	u	u	u		fg
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fox Sparrow	t	u	u			f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Snow Bunting	tW				u	g
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dark-eyed Junco	bW	a	a	a	a	fbg

Blackbirds - Oriole							
<input type="checkbox"/>	Bobolink	t	u	u			g
<input type="checkbox"/>	Red-winged Blackbird	B	c	c	u		gp
<input type="checkbox"/>	Western Meadowlark	B	c	c	c		g
<input type="checkbox"/>	Yellow-headed Blackbird	B	c	c	c		gp
<input type="checkbox"/>	Brewer's Blackbird	t	u	u	u		gp
<input type="checkbox"/>	Brown-headed Cowbird	t	u	u			fgp
<input type="checkbox"/>	Northern Oriole	t	u	u			f

Finches							
<input type="checkbox"/>	American Goldfinch	b	u	u	u		gf
<input type="checkbox"/>	Red Crossbill	t	o	o			f
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pine Siskin	t	u	u	u		fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cassin's Finch	t	u	u			fb
<input type="checkbox"/>	Evening Grosbeak	t	o	o	o		f

Please request a map of the BCWMA or send any new information to:

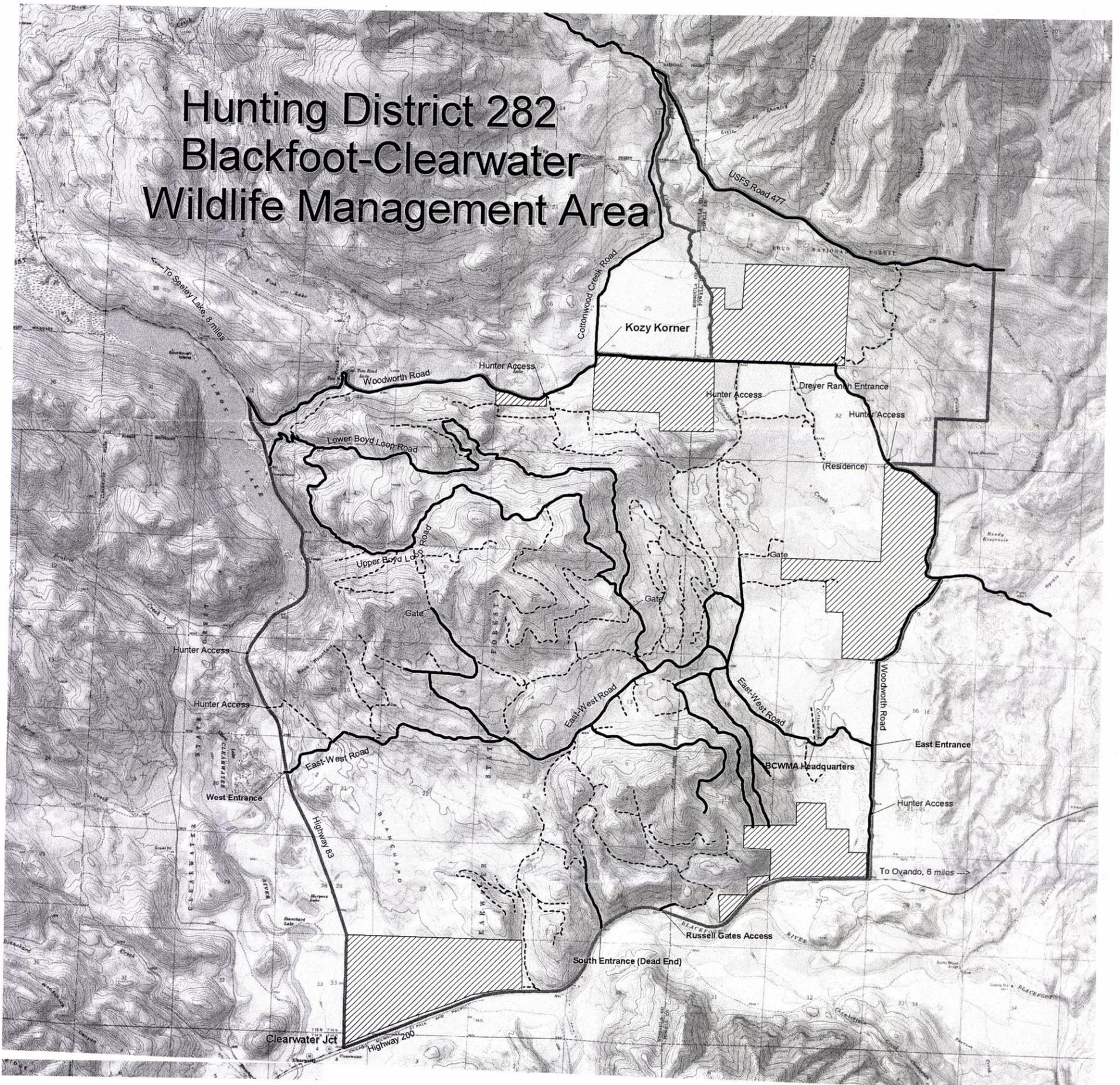


**Montana Fish & Wildlife Parks**

**Region 2 Headquarters**  
**3201 Spurgin Rd.**  
**Missoula, MT 59801**  
**Phone: (406)542-5500**



# Hunting District 282 Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area

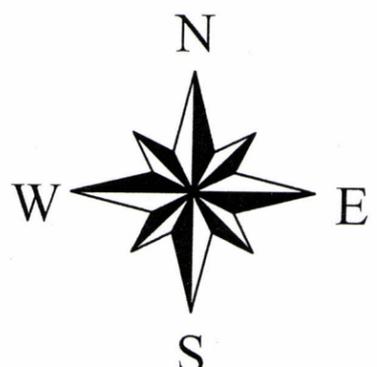


Base maps used: USGS 1:24,000 scale maps  
Maps provided by TOPO! software, a product  
of National Geographic



HD 282 Legal Description: Those portions of Missoula and Powell Counties lying within the following area: Beginning at the junction of State Routes 200 and 83, then seven miles north on Highway 83 to the Woodward Road, then east on the Woodward Road to the Cottonwood Creek Road at Kozy Korner, then one mile east on the Woodward Road to Cottonwood Creek, then north along Cottonwood Creek to USFS Road 477, then four miles southeast on road 477 to the northeast corner of Section 28 (T16N,R13W) then south 1.5 miles, then west 0.5 miles, then south 0.5 miles, then west 0.4 miles to the Woodward Road, then south on the Woodward Road to State Route 200, then six miles west on said route to its junction with State Route 83, the point of origin.

- BCWMA
-  service roads (non-motorized travel only)
-  primary roads (open to motorized travel)
-  Hunting District 282 Boundary
-  private land



Projection: UTM Zone 12

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**Draft Socio-Economic  
Assessment**

**BLACKFOOT-CLEARWATER**  
**FEE TITLE PURCHASE**  
**DRAFT SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT**

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS

Prepared by:  
Rob Brooks  
April 2004

## I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature (MCA 87-1-241 and MCA 87-1-242), authorizes Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) to acquire an interest in land for the purpose of protecting and improving wildlife habitat. These acquisitions can be through fee title, conservation easements, or leasing. In 1989, the Montana legislature passed House Bill 720 requiring that a socioeconomic assessment be completed when wildlife habitat is acquired using Habitat Montana monies. These assessments evaluate the significant social and economic impacts of the purchase on local governments, employment, schools, and impacts on local businesses.

This socioeconomic evaluation addresses the fee title purchase of land presently owned by Plum Creek Timber Company, L.P., which is under purchase agreement with The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The report addresses the physical and institutional setting as well as the social and economic impacts associated with the proposed conservation easement.

## II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

### A. Property Description

The subject property is located about 45 miles from Missoula, Mt. within the administrative boundary of the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area (BCWMA). This fee title purchase encompasses approximately 3,834 acres. A detailed description of this property is included in the draft environmental assessment (EA).

### B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations

As part of the BCWMA complex, this property provides winter range for a migratory population of about 800-900 mule deer and forms an integral component of the larger winter concentration area for migratory populations of 900-1,100 elk and several-hundred white-tailed deer, as well as other wildlife.

### C. Current Use

Plum Creek Timber currently owns this property. Under their ownership, selective overstory timber harvest has occurred, the most current in 2003. Plum Creek is under contract to sell this land to TNC only, so it is not up for sale on the open market at this time. In turn, TNC (or the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, as the case may be) intends to sell this land to MFWP only.

## D. Management Alternatives

- 1) Fee title purchase of the subject property by MFWP
- 2) No purchase

Alternative 1, fee title purchase of the property will protect the integrity of the BCWMA by preserving the open space character of the WMA, allow MFWP to manage the subject lands as part of the BCWMA, and maintain the current level of public access to the property.

Alternative 2, the no purchase option, leaves this land at risk in terms of preserving its wildlife habitat value and providing public access. Currently, Plum Creek is not offering this land for sale on the open market. If MFWP does not purchase the subject property the possibility of subdivision may become a real threat given the location and access of the property, as described in the draft EA. While this land is owned by Plum Creek Timber it is being managed for commercial timber production and harvest.

## III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Section II identified the management alternatives this report addresses. Fee title purchase will provide long term protection of important wildlife habitat, help to preserve the open space characteristics and integrity of the BCWMA, and provide for public access. Section III quantifies the social and economic consequences of the two management alternatives following two basic accounting stances: financial and local area impacts.

Financial impacts address the cost of the fee title purchase to MFWP and discuss the impacts on tax revenues to local government agencies including school districts.

Expenditure data associated with the use of the property provides information for analyzing the impacts these expenditures have on local businesses (i.e. income and employment).

### A. Financial Impacts

The financial impacts on MFWP are related to the fee title purchase price and the maintenance/management costs. The Plum Creek property will cost MFWP up to \$3,300,000 initially. MFWP expects a grant from the federal Forest Legacy program in 2005, which would repay MFWP in full for this expenditure. This full repayment, although likely (as detailed in the draft EA), is not within MFWP's sole authority to guarantee, and could be awarded in full, in part, one or more years after 2005, or not at all, depending on appropriations by the U. S. Congress. Maintenance/management costs related to the purchase are associated with weed control, fencing, etc.

The financial impacts to local governments are the potential changes in tax revenues resulting

from the fee title purchase. MCA 87-1-603 states that “ the treasurer of each county in which the department owns any land shall describe the land, state the number of acres in each parcel, and request the drawing of a warrant to the county in a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment of the property were it taxable to a private citizen.” There will be no significant changes in property tax revenues to local governments including schools due to the purchase of this land by MFWP.

#### B. Economic Impacts

The purchase of this land will have a minimal but negative impact on timber harvest by Plum Creek. According to the management plan for this land “forest management would shift from an emphasis on commercial timber production to an emphasis on providing forested forage and cover for wintering mule deer and elk.”

### FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

As noted at the beginning of this document, the Plum Creek property is located in Missoula County and Powell County near the community of Seeley Lake.

This fee title purchase will provide protection for critical winter habitat for elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer that utilize the BCWMA. The purchase will remove the concern about subdivision thereby preserving the integrity of the BCWMA.

The fee title purchase by MFWP of the subject property will not have a significant effect on tax revenues collected by Missoula County or Powell County on these acres from their current levels.

The impact to local businesses will be minimal. There will be a shift in timber management on the property from commercial timber production to timber management focused on providing forage and cover for mule deer and elk. The subject property was commercially logged in the mid-1990s to early 2000s. MFWP currently leases the grazing rights from Plum Creek and does not plan on introducing livestock on these acres in the near future.