



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1400 South 19th Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59718

21 May 2004

To: Governor's Office, Todd O'Hair, State Capitol, Room 204, P.O. Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801
Environmental Quality Council, State Capitol, Room 106, P.O. Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Metcalf Building, P.O. Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

Director's Office Parks Division Lands Section FWP Commissioners
Fisheries Division Legal Unit Wildlife Division Design & Construction

MT Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, P.O. Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202

MT State Parks Association, P.O. Box 699, Billings, MT 59103

MT State Library, 1515 E. Sixth Ave., P.O. Box 201800, Helena, MT 59620

James Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, P.O. Box 1184, Helena, MT 59624

Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624

Jennifer Towler, Sacajawea Audubon Society, P.O. Box 1711, Bozeman, MT 59717

George Ochenski, P.O. Box 689, Helena, MT 59624

Jerry DiMarco, P.O. Box 1571, Bozeman, MT 59771

Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624

Wayne Hurst, P.O. Box 728, Libby, MT 59923

Bob Raney, 112 S. 6th St., Livingston, MT 59047

RECEIVED

MAY 24 2004

LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL
POLICY OFFICE

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Attached is the decision notice for the Dillon – Twin Bridges Sandhill Crane Hunting Area Expansion. In the decision document, I accept the information presented in the draft environmental assessment checklist as final. Please feel free to contact me if you are missing any portion of this documentation.

The decision document includes a summary of the two public comments received on the proposed expansion. It also explains how FWP considered and incorporated these comments in formulating a recommendation.

FWP will request approval of the expansion at the monthly Commission meeting scheduled for June 10, 2004 in Helena. This meeting is open to the public, as are other regularly scheduled Commission meetings.

Questions regarding this decision notice may be directed to Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1400 S. 19th Ave., Bozeman, MT 59718, (406) 994-4042 or e-mailed to bbrannon@state.mt.us. Thank you for your interest and participation.

Sincerely,

Patrick J. Flowers
Regional Supervisor



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

DECISION NOTICE

Expansion of Dillon – Twin Bridges Sandhill Crane Hunting Area
May 21, 2004

Proposal

Expansion of the Dillon – Twin Bridges RMP (Rocky Mountain Population) Sandhill Crane hunting area is proposed to allow the harvest of cranes occupying the area between Cardwell and Twin Bridges along the Jefferson River during the pre-migration staging period in the fall. The project is needed to help prevent depredation by these birds to private crop lands in the area, and to provide the limited number of hunters holding crane permits the opportunity to hunt in a larger area with more birds. The area to be included is specifically defined by the following proposed description of a legal hunting area. Those portions of the proposed description that would be added appear in bold italics.

Proposed RMP Crane Hunt Area

Beaverhead – Jefferson River Legal Description

That portion of Beaverhead and Madison counties lying within the following described boundaries:

Beginning at Dillon, thence northerly along US Hwy 91 to its intersection with the Big Hole River at Brown's Bridge north of Glen, thence southeasterly and northeasterly along the Big Hole River to High Road, thence east along High Road to State Highway 41, thence east along said highway to the Beaverhead River, ***thence north along said river to the Jefferson River and north along the Jefferson River to the Ironrod Bridge, thence northeasterly along State Highway 41 to the junction with State Highway 55, thence northeasterly along said highway to the junction with Interstate Highway 90 (I-90), thence east along I-90 to Cardwell and Route 359, thence south along Route 359 to the Point of Rocks Road, thence southwesterly along the Point of Rocks Road to Bayers Lane, thence southwesterly along Bayers Lane to State Highway 41, thence east along State Highway 41 to the Beaverhead River,*** thence south along the Beaverhead River to the mouth of the Ruby River, thence southeasterly along the Ruby River to the East Bench Road, thence southwesterly along the East Bench Road to the East Bench Canal, thence southwesterly along said canal to the Sweetwater Road, thence west along Sweetwater Road to Dillon, the point of beginning.

Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) Process

Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) prepared an environmental assessment checklist pursuant to MEPA. FWP made this document available during a public comment period that began on March 15, 2004 and ended on April 15, 2004. FWP advertised the public comment period and the availability of the proposal documentation with legal notices in the Montana Standard and Dillon Tribune as well as posted the environmental assessment on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks website for public review. FWP distributed more than twenty-five hardcopies of the documentation immediately before the public comment period began, and responded to additional requests as they were received.

Summary of Public Comment

Two individuals and/or organizations, companies or agencies participated in the public involvement process by commenting on the draft proposal or requesting clarification. FWP received one written and two e-mail responses to the proposal. Following is a complete list of individuals and organizations that provided comments for the record:

1. Jerry DiMarco - E-mail (2)

Jerry asked several questions for clarification and later followed up with comments. Included was a comment that he finds the hunting of cranes aesthetically unappealing. He thought that there was an obvious conflict between hunters and viewers and for that reason, hunting should not be allowed on public land in the area. Probably no more than 5% of the land being proposed for addition to the hunting area is public. In addition, hunting of cranes in this area only occurs for a two-week period annually, in September. The number of hunters is presently limited to 35 and they would be hunting over a larger area with this proposal. Since the amount of public land included is so limited and the hunting season is open only two of fifty-two weeks in the year, FWP considers the potential for conflict of use on public lands to be very minimal.

2. Montana Historical Society - Letter

The Montana Historical Society commented that the proposal does not have the potential to impact cultural properties.

No other issues were raised or comments offered that require a formal response. Copies of all written and e-mailed comments are available in the project file for this proposal.

Decision

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

Utilizing the environmental assessment checklist and public comment, a decision must be rendered by FWP that addresses the concerns and issues identified for the proposed Sandhill Crane hunting area expansion. In light of public comments and internal agency review, I accept the draft environmental assessment checklist as final. I select the proposed action to expand the Dillon – Twin Bridges RMP Sandhill Crane hunting area to include the area between Cardwell and Twin Bridges along the Jefferson River.

In consideration of these facts, I recommend that the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission approve the hunting area expansion.



Patrick J. Flowers

Regional Supervisor