



**Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks**

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LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL  
POLICY OFFICE

Region 2 Headquarters  
3201 Spurgin Road  
Missoula, MT 59804-3101  
June 13, 2005

Governor's Office, Attn: Mike Volesky, PO Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801

Environmental Quality Council, PO Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704

\*Dept. of Environmental Quality, PO Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901

\*Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, POB 201601, Helena, MT 59620-1601

\*Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

Website, Commission Secretary, Division Secretaries, Regional Office Managers, Region 2  
Information Officer

\*State Historic Preservation Office, PO Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202

\*MT State Library, PO BOX 201800, Helena, MT 59620-1800

MT Environmental Information Center, Attn: Jim Jensen, POB 1184, Helena, MT 59624-1184

Deerlodge Ranger District, 1 Hollenbeck Rd., Deer Lodge, MT 59722

Skyline Sportsmen, PO Box 173, Butte, MT 59703

Anaconda Sportsmen, 2 Cherry, Anaconda, MT 59711

Montana Natural Heritage Center, POB 201800, Helena, MT 59620-1800

Montana Audubon Society, POB 595, Helena 59624-0595

Montana Stockgrowers, 420 N. California, Helena, MT 59601

Montana Wildlife Federation, POB 1175, Helena, MT 59624-1175

Deer Lodge County Weed Supervisor, 800 S. Main, Anaconda, MT 59711

Deer Lodge County Commissioners, 800 S. Main, Anaconda, MT 59711

\*Mailed electronically

Dear Interested Citizen:

Enclosed you will find for your review the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for a Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) proposal to acquire a 96.26-acre parcel west of Anaconda in Deer Lodge County. John Long currently owns the property, which lies a quarter of a mile west of the MFWP's existing Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area (WMA). If acquired the property would become the Blue-eyed Nellie West WMA. The purpose of this proposal would be to acquire critical year-round habitat for bighorn sheep.

MFWP will hold a public hearing in Anaconda on June 29 (Wednesday) at 6:30 PM at the Ancient Order of the Hibernians Hall (110 Cherry Street, Anaconda, across from Hardee's) to discuss this proposed acquisition and take public comment.

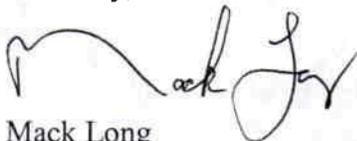
This draft EA is available for review in Helena at MFWP's Headquarters, the State Library and the Environmental Quality Council. It also may be obtained from the Region 2 MFWP

Headquarters or viewed on MFWP's Internet website at <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("Recent Public Notices").

Comments on this draft EA must be received no later than 5:00 pm July 13, 2005. Comments should be mailed to Ray Vinkey, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1115 West Fourth Street, Anaconda, MT 59711 or emailed to [rvinkey@mt.gov](mailto:rvinkey@mt.gov). If you have questions, please contact him at 406-563-5668.

As part of the decision making process under MEPA, I plan to issue the Decision Notice for this EA by July 15<sup>th</sup>. The Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission has the final decision-making authority for MFWP land purchase proposals, and the Commission will be asked to render final decision on this proposal at its August 4 meeting in Helena. Approval will also be necessary from the Montana Board of Land Commissioners.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mack Long". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mack" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Long".

Mack Long  
Regional Supervisor

ML/sr

Enclosure: Blue-eyed Nellie West EA, Draft Management Plan, and Socioeconomic Assessment

**PROPOSED PROPERTY ACQUISITION**

**BLUE-EYED NELLIE WEST  
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA**

**LONG PROPERTY**



**Rocky Mountain Bighorn Rams**

*Final 6/9/05 version*

**ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
MANAGEMENT PLAN  
SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT**



**Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) invites the public to comment on this proposal to acquire a 96.26-acre private parcel west of Anaconda, Deer Lodge County, Montana from John Long for approximately \$300,000. This parcel lies one-quarter of a mile west of the existing Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area (WMA), which is composed of 6.27 acres purchased in 2000. Blue-eyed Nellie WMA was purchased to provide winter range for bighorn sheep and acquisition of the Long property (the proposed Blue-eyed Nellie West WMA), would conserve vital winter range, land used during the rut, a critical movement corridor (between public lands to the north and south of Montana Highway 1), and a route to water on Warm Springs Creek.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

### **Statement of Purpose**

If accomplished, this purchase would ensure that essential habitat for bighorn sheep in the Lost Creek herd is preserved in perpetuity. Most of the growth in Anaconda is occurring west of town and private lands between Anaconda and Georgetown Lake are being subdivided rapidly. The Long parcel could be readily subdivided because it is close to a highway, existing power, and telephone lines. Septic systems and wells are in place on adjacent properties. Properties in the area are being actively sought for development and the owner has received offers to purchase this parcel. If MFWP does not acquire the Long property it would be sold and developed in the immediate future and important bighorn sheep habitat would be lost forever. Development has occurred in the immediate area within the last 5-years (the Haffney Subdivision, West Park Subdivision Number One and Two), lots less than a mile east are currently being sold and developed, and a new subdivision is proposed in adjacent to this parcel. (Rejection of the proposed action would by default result in development of this land). Purchase of this important habitat would preclude future development on site and ensure that this important wildlife habitat would be conserved for future generations.

### **Authority and Direction**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is authorized by State law (87-1-209 MCA) to purchase wildlife habitat that is seriously threatened for conservation, using funds from the Habitat Montana program. Earmarked revenues obtained primarily from the sale of non-resident hunting licenses fund the majority of Habitat Montana programs. Funding for this purchase would also come from revenue from sale of the bighorn sheep license auction (MCA 87-2-722), funds from the North American Foundation for Wild Sheep, and the Anaconda Sportsmen's Association. An Environmental Assessment (EA) is required to assess the impacts of this proposal on the environment.

The Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission is the decision-making authority for land purchase proposals by MFWP and will review this proposal. Since the proposed

sale price is in excess of \$100,000, the Montana Board of Land Commissioners would also review this proposal. After completion of the public comment period, MFWP would release a recommended decision incorporating public comment, and that recommendation would be reviewed by both the MFWP Commission and the Montana Board of Land Commissioners.

### **Area Description and Description of Resources**

The 96.26- acre parcel is located at Township 5 N, Range 12 W, in the SE1/4 of Section 22 and the SW1/4 of Section 23 Anaconda, Deerlodge County, Montana. The property is part of the Fred Brown Placer mining claim and is located 5 miles northwest of the town of Anaconda (Figure 1) in the Warm Springs drainage and close to substantial state and federal land holdings, including MFWP's Garry Mountain and Blue-eyed Nellie WMAs and United States Forest Service (USFS) lands (Figures 2 & 3). Several significant land exchanges have been completed recently in the immediate area: 1) the Forest Service completed the Lost Creek Land Exchange which covers 14,000 acres adjoining the Long property in 1994; 2) MFWP in cooperation with the Natural Resource Damage Program and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation completed the purchase of the 9,000-acre Garry WMA in 2002; and 3) the Forest Service obtained the 25,000-acre "Watershed" property between Garry WMA and Georgetown Lake in 2002. All of these land acquisitions and exchanges have occurred in upland habitats. The Long property sits in a narrow valley bottom and would preserve connectivity between Forest Service lands in the foothills of the Flint Creek Range and MFWP property in the foothills of the Pintler Range.

Vegetation on the property is a mix of native and introduced grasses, forbs, sage brush (*Artemisia* spp.), juniper (*Juniperus* spp.), rabbit brush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*), and Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*; Figure 4). Grassland habitat is predominant. Spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*) has invaded the site. No standing or perennial water exists on the property and the topography on site is level. Bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) use the area intensively, and the site also receives intermittent use by mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), whitetail deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*), as well as variety of mammals and birds found in bunchgrass grasslands and juniper shrub land habitats.

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

The proposed action is for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to acquire a fee title for 96.26-acres owned by John Long for the cost of approximately \$300,000 from Habitat Montana and the Capital Sheep Acquisition Fund. This property would be managed in conjunction with the nearby Blue-eyed Nellie WMA, which lies a quarter mile to the east. All regulations pertinent to the Blue-eyed Nellie WMA (see Management Plan and its Appendix A) would apply to Blue-eyed Nellie West upon its purchase, and they would be managed as one unit. Benefits of the proposed action would include conservation of wildlife habitat, creation of wildlife viewing opportunities, avoidance of potential conflicts between people and wildlife, control of invasive weeds, and preservation of

critical winter range for bighorn sheep and mule deer. The Lost Creek bighorn sheep herd would directly benefit from this purchase. Hunting and observation of this herd provide significant revenue and pride to the local community. Trophy bighorn rams are consistently harvested from this herd.

## **ALTERNATIVE TO THE PROPOSED ACTION**

### **Alternative A - No Action**

The no action alternative leaves the property in private ownership. The property would remain subject to all legal rights of use, including residential subdivision and other commercial practices. The landowner has expressed his intent to sell the property outright so a conservation easement or lease is not a reasonable alternative.

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

### *Threatened and Endangered Species*

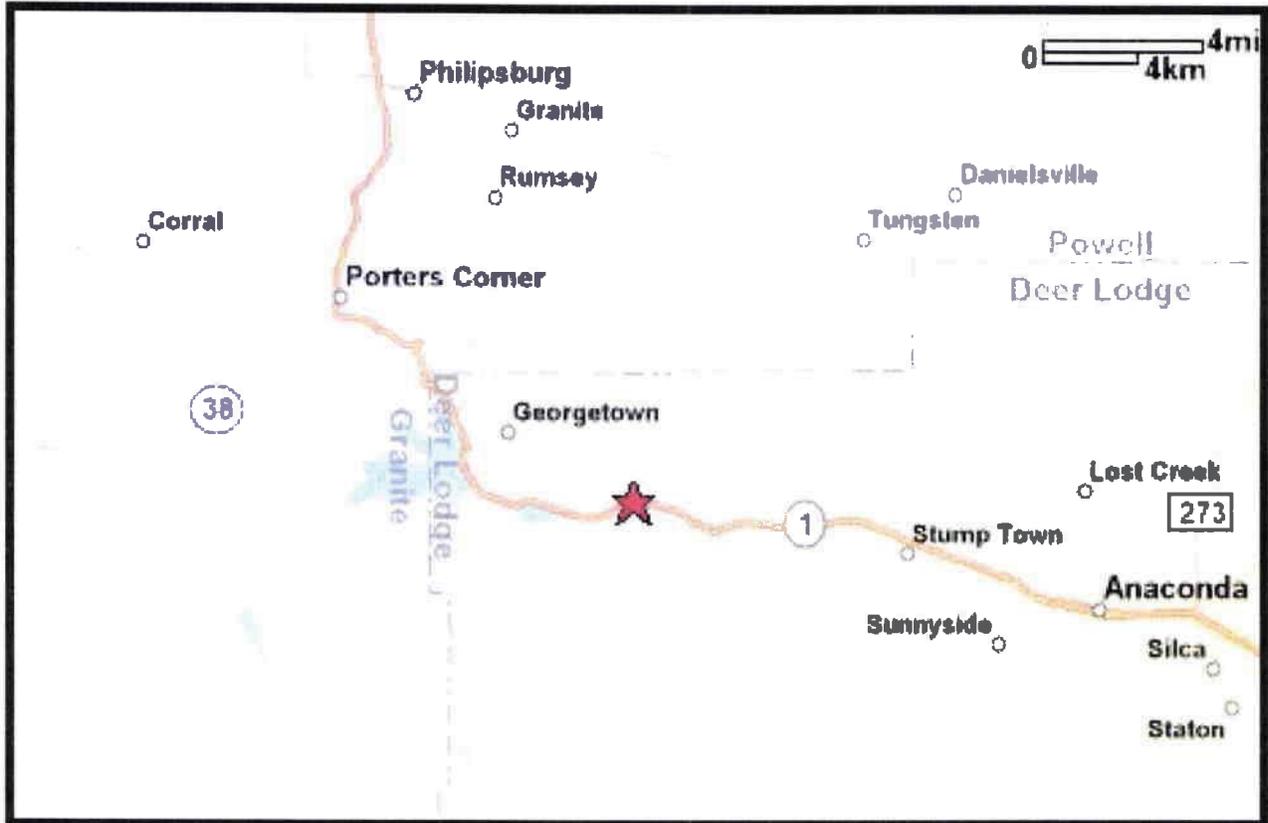
No threatened and endangered species, plant or animal, that are present in the region are known to or likely to use the proposed Blue-eyed Nellie West WMA. Adjacent residential sites, a nearby gravel pit, and mining activity that have occurred here limit wildlife use to species, like bighorn, that are tolerant of human disturbance. Bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*) are a threatened species that occur in the Upper Clark Fork watershed, including Warm Springs Creek. Purchase of this parcel may indirectly benefit bull trout by precluding installation of septic systems and associated nutrient input into Warm Springs.

Alternative A (no action): This action would not preclude future development of the site. If development occurs and septic systems are installed on the Long property water quality in Warm Springs Creek (200 yards to the south) and bull trout may be impacted. The no action alternative is unlikely to impact other threatened or endangered species and direct impacts to bull trout would be limited.

### *Species of Concern*

Westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*) is a sensitive species that resides in Warm Springs Creek. There are no perennial or intermittent streams on the property, but future activities that result in significant erosion or nutrient input could adversely affect Westslope cutthroat trout within the drainage. The proposed action would ensure that trout would not be impacted by development of the Long property. No other sensitive species are known to inhabit the property, nearby lands or streams.

Figure 1. Location of Long property, west of Anaconda, Deer Lodge County.



(Copyright MapQuest.com 2005)

Figure 2. Long property in relation to existing Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs).

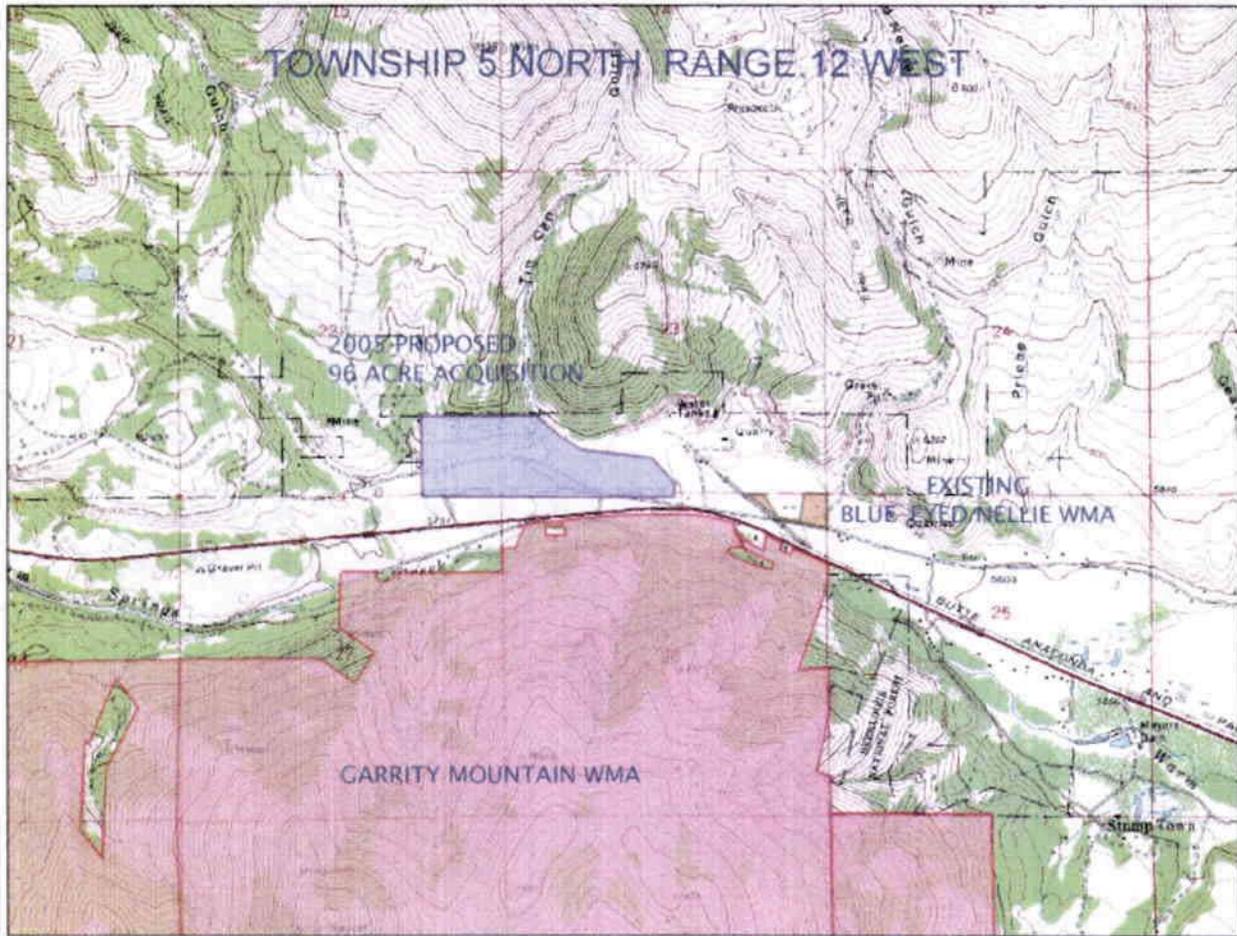


Figure 3. Long property and surrounding landownership.

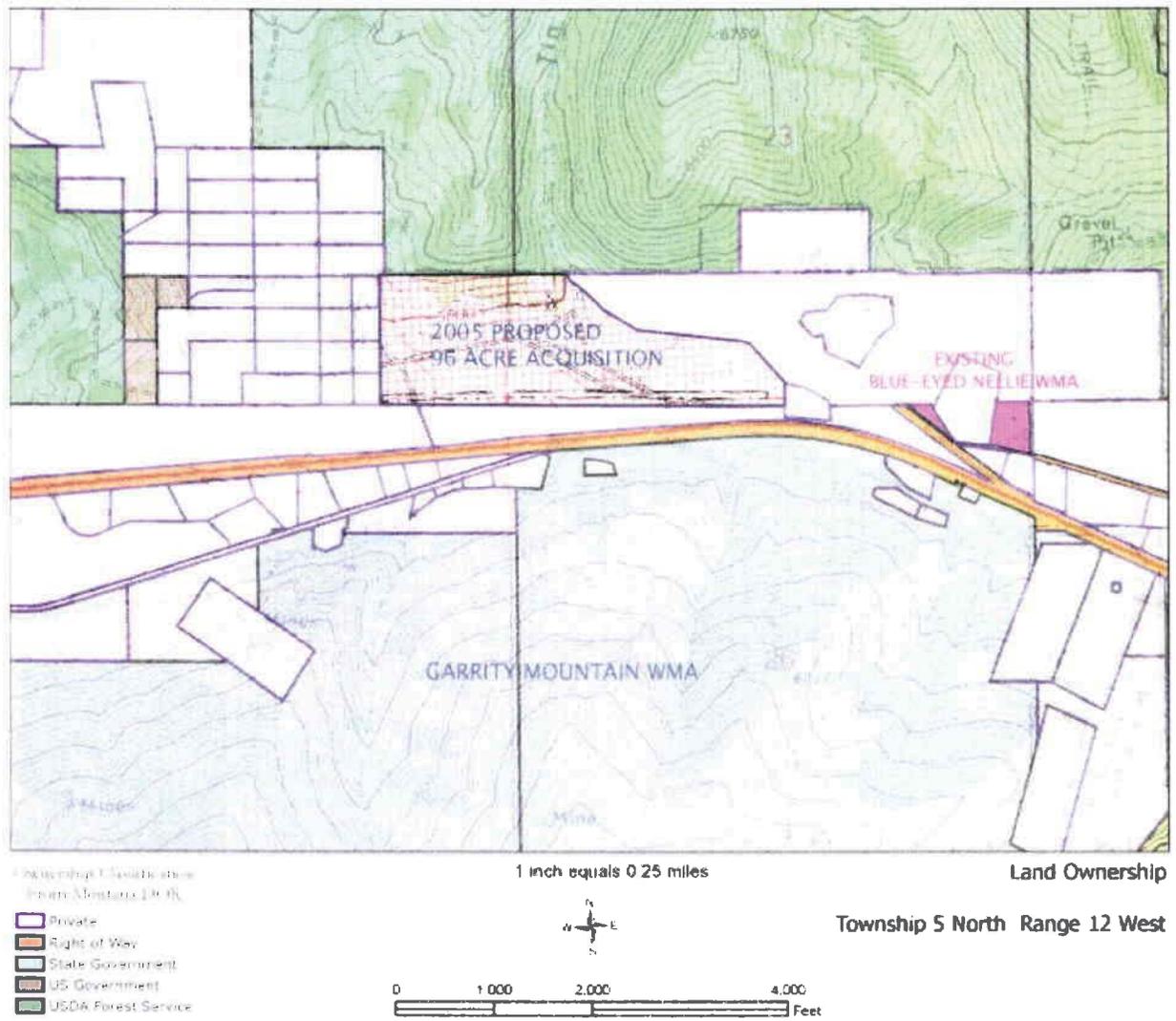
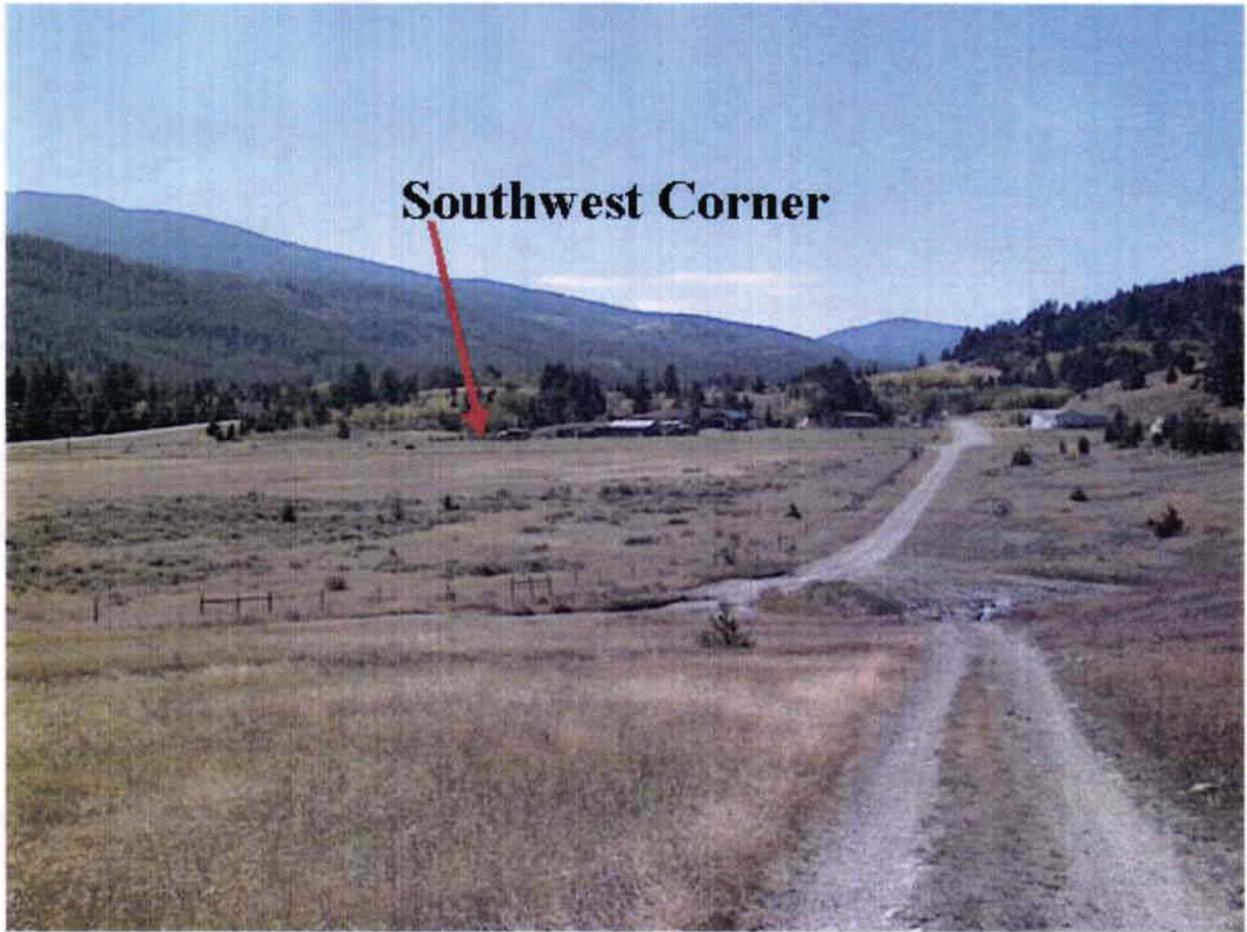


Figure 4. Long property, looking west towards the southwest corner.



Alternative A (no action): This action would maintain private ownership of this land and potential risks of adverse impacts from development to sensitive species.

### *Wildlife general*

The proposed action would protect wildlife habitat in Anaconda's west valley. Ungulate use of the proposed Blue-eyed Nellie West WMA includes bighorn sheep from the Lost Creek herd (around two hundred sheep), mule deer, whitetail deer, and a variety of mammals and birds. The Long property is key habitat for bighorn sheep.

Bighorn use the Long property throughout the year as a movement corridor, the most intensive use occurs from November to March. During the rut, rams and ewes use the property extensively. Bighorn ewes and lambs as well as mule deer use 300-acres of privately owned grasslands, which lie north of Highway 1 and Cable Mountain Road and between Tin Can Gulch and Priebe Gulch, during periods of severe winter weather and during the spring green-up. Up to 120 sheep in recent years (the majority of the herd) have been observed on this traditional winter range. Sheep cross the Long property regularly to drink at Warm Springs Creek.

If the Long property is acquired the Blue-eyed Nellie West and Blue-eyed Nellie WMAs will protect a third of this winter range. Wintering wildlife will be protected from disturbance and assured forage in lean months. Ewes give birth to their lambs in the foothills just above the property, and elk, mule deer, and black bear also reside nearby.

Alternative A (no action): This action would maintain the existing natural condition in the short-term, but would not protect against future development and losses of habitat that may occur as a result. Given the very high probability of development on this parcel, the selection of the no action alternative is likely to result in the loss of critical habitat for the Lost Creek bighorn herd.

Development of this land would sever a movement corridor between sheep habitat in the Flint Creek Range and Pintler Mountains, make it difficult for bighorn to reach water on Warm Springs Creek, eliminate winter forage, and increase conflicts between wildlife, people and domestic animals. The cumulative impact of these stresses on bighorn would be negative; effects could include higher individual mortality, reduced lamb production, reduced herd size, increased habitat fragmentation, and greater odds of die-offs related to disease. Ultimately herd survival could be jeopardized.

### *Fisheries general*

Since there is no perennial water on site the proposal would have no direct impact to fisheries. If developed, septic systems on the 96 acres could lead to indirectly to sedimentation in Warm Springs Creek. Implementation of this proposal will avoid this adverse impact.

Alternative A (no action): The current condition and its associated liabilities would be retained under Alternative A.

#### *Wetlands and Riparian Habitats*

No wetlands or riparian sites occur on the Long property; thus, there would be no direct impacts to these resources from the proposal.

Alternative A (no action): This action would also maintain the current condition.

#### *Vegetation, Forest and Fire Management*

Native vegetation on site is composed of species associated with intermountain grassland and shrub grassland including bunch grasses, sage brush, rabbit brush, and juniper. Spotted knapweed infestations occur, especially on the east side of the property. Weed control is part of the Blue-eyed Nellie management plan and would occur here if the proposal were implemented; consequent control of weeds would benefit native vegetation and wildlife. Only a handful of scattered Douglas fir trees exist here; so, active forest management is not necessary. If acquired by MFWP fire suppression would occur on the proposed Blue-eyed Nellie West WMA in accordance with an agreement with the Montana Department of Natural Resources.

Alternative A (no action): Under this alternative impacts to vegetation would depend on the actions of the owner and future buyers. If developed, the extent and diversity of native vegetation would be reduced. There is no guarantee that weeds would be controlled under the no action scenario; fire management would not be impacted.

#### *Public Access, Recreation and Hunting*

The proposed action would allow public access; a de facto public road would remain open for the immediate future. Hiking and wildlife viewing opportunities would be secured on site. The public is frequently able to view wild bighorn and the sheep attract viewers from outside the community as well as locally. Wildlife education kiosks could be incorporated into the design of the WMA. The Lost Creek herd provides over 200 hunter days and revenue associated with hunter use of the area; selection of the proposed action would help to maintain this herd and the opportunities for hunting and wildlife viewing that it provides.

Alternative A (no action): Under Alternative A, private parties would retain sole legal access to the area. There would be no assurance that opportunities for wildlife viewing or public access would be preserved.

#### *Livestock Grazing*

Livestock grazing does not currently occur on the Long property, but may occur here at the owner's discretion. If purchased, livestock grazing would be prohibited to assure

maximum forage production for wild ungulates and to minimize contact between wild and domestic animals. A net gain in forage for wild ungulates and a loss of forage for domestic ungulates would occur. Because of the high risk to bighorn sheep from pathogens transmitted from domestic sheep (and goats), a guarantee that domestic animals will not occur on this parcel would be beneficial to the Lost Creek herd.

Alternative A (no action): This alternative would maintain the current condition, which allows private parties to graze livestock on this parcel. The impact of this grazing on vegetation would depend on the intensity of use. Serious risks to wild bighorn from disease transmission would not be curtailed.

#### *Air and Water Quality*

The proposed action would not affect air and water quality, but would preclude impacts associated with possible future activities on site.

Alternative A (no action): This action would not effect air and water quality directly, but if future development were to occur here development would impact air and/or water quality. Septic systems would be installed as part of a development and leaching of nutrients from these systems can impact water quality. Additional air pollution would result from inputs resulting from burning fossil fuels.

#### *Historic and Cultural Resources*

There are no known significant historic or cultural resources in the area. The Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) will be contacted to determine if they have records of significant cultural resources on the property.

Alternative A (no action): This action would maintain the current condition.

#### *Land Use, Neighboring Landowners and Local Community*

Under the proposed action the land would remain undeveloped, no commercial activities, grazing or timber harvest would occur. Neighboring landowners include the Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO; 88 acres), the United States Forest Service (thousands of contiguous acres), and six private individuals (one owns 60 acres, another 29 and four own less than 4 acres each). Sale of the Long property to MFWP will maintain open space in the neighborhood as well as the rural character of the area. The local community would retain their opportunities to view, photograph and hunt sheep in the area. Revenues associated with hunting and viewing the bighorn would be retained or enhanced by the proposal (see Socio-Economic Report).

Alternative A (no action): Residential development of this site would provide up to ten home sites (assuming 10 acre lots). Additional local revenues would be produced by construction of homes here and future tax receipts. Wildlife viewing, photography, access, hunting, and scenic vistas would be compromised.

### *Economic*

The proposed action would eliminate the possibility of future residential and commercial development on the subject land. Costs to the city and county associated with providing services and utilities would be avoided. The land would remain taxable as agricultural land, but not as a residential land and improvements (see the Socio-Economic Report).

Alternative A (no action): This action would allow for development and additional tax revenue if approved by the County Planning Board. The county would incur additional expenses associated with supplying services to a new subdivision.

### *Cumulative Impacts*

Approval of the proposed action would have an overall positive impact on the environment. Establishment of the Blue-eyed Nellie West WMA will preserve public access, wildlife habitat and viewing opportunities, and contribute to the long-term health and survival of the Lost Creek bighorn herd by protecting essential winter range and a travel corridor. Adverse environmental impacts that would result from residential or commercial development of this property would be avoided.

Alternative A (no action): The no action alternative would by default result in residential and/or commercial development and cumulative adverse impacts to the environment when this occurs. Wildlife habitat would be lost with subdivision, and revenue associated with viewing and hunting the bighorn would be jeopardized. Tax revenue may be gained at the expense of environmental impacts, lost wildlife habitat, and increased threats to the health of the Lost Creek bighorn herd.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Formal public participation related to MFWP's proposed purchase of the Long property, will begin with the availability of this environmental assessment for public review and comment. The availability of this EA for public review will be advertised in newspapers statewide, a copy of the EA will be mailed to all parties who indicate an interest in this proposal, and the EA will be posted on MFWP's website (<http://fwp.state.mt.us>). A thirty-day public review period will run from June 14, 2005 through July 13, 2005. On June 29, 2005 at 6:30 pm at Anaconda at the Ancient Order of the Hibernarians Hall (AOH; at 110 Cherry Street across from Hardee's) a public hearing will be held. After reviewing public input received on or before July 13, 2005 MFWP will select a preferred alternative and issue a Decision Notice. The Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission will be asked to render final decision on this proposal at its meeting on August 4, 2005 (MFWP Headquarters, Helena). Approval will also be necessary from the Montana Board of Land Commissioners.

Comments should be addressed to Ray Vinkey; Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; 1115 West Fourth Street; Anaconda, MT 59711 (406-563-5668; [rvinkey@mt.gov](mailto:rvinkey@mt.gov)). For consideration, comments must be received by Vinkey no later than July 13, 2005.

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

Based on an evaluation of impacts to the environment under the Montana Environmental Protection Act (MEPA), this environmental review found no significant impacts from the proposed action. Due to this finding an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not necessary and an EA is the appropriate level of analysis.

### **Person Responsible for Preparing this Environmental Assessment**

Ray Vinkey, Wildlife Biologist  
Montana Fish, Wildlife, & Parks  
1115 West Fourth St.  
Anaconda, Montana 59711  
406-563-5568  
[rvinkey@mt.gov](mailto:rvinkey@mt.gov)

**MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**BLUE-EYED NELLIE WEST  
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA**

**LONG PROPERTY**

The Long property is within a quarter mile of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area (WMA). If acquired by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks the property will become Blue-eyed Nellie West, an expansion of Blue-eyed Nellie WMA, and will be managed according to the same principles and regulations. The Management Plan for Blue-eyed Nellie WMA follows in Appendix A. The plan has three objectives: 1) Prevent soil erosion and conserve and improve vegetation communities, striving for maximum vegetation diversity dependent on soil types, 2) Manage for wintering bighorn sheep use during short periods of extreme winter conditions and early spring green up; maintain existing non-game species, and 3) Provide for public hunting and recreation.

## Appendix A.

### **Blue-eyed Nellie\* Wildlife Management Area Management Plan July 28, 2000**

*\* Originally Blue-eyed Nellie WMA was called the Gun Club; this document was prepared by Dan Hook (former MFWP wildlife biologist) prior to purchase of the WMA.*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Gun Club (Blue-eyed Nellie) acquisition would involve 6.27 acres north of Cable Road in Section 26, Township 5 north, Range 12 west. It is the first of a series of proposed acquisitions and easements in the area designed to protect and maintain bighorn sheep winter range in the west valley of Anaconda. These acquisitions and easements would adjoin 12,000 acres recently acquired by the U.S. Forest Service through the Lost Creek land exchange.

The purpose of this 6.27-acre acquisition is to provide critical winter range for bighorn sheep and to perpetuate public access to Blue-eyed Nellie Gulch. The property would also provide an area for a joint FWP/USFS development of a public watchable wildlife area and interpretive site. It would also improve management of public access to the bighorn winter range during seasonal vehicle closures. The site also has historically provided important administrative use during bighorn trapping and transplanting operations.

#### *Area Description*

The Gun Club property is 6.27 acres located north of Cable Road approximately 4 miles west of Anaconda. The property is open grassland in the Warm Springs Creek Valley at 5267 feet elevation. A small grove of cottonwoods occurs around an old home site. The site is physically divided into 2 parcels of approximately 2 and 4 acres with the Anaconda Gun Club in the middle. Southern Cross L.L.C. (*now ARCO*) borders the property to the north and west, Wayne Ternes on the east, and Audrey Haffey to the south.

#### **GOAL**

Manage for highly productive, diverse vegetative communities that will provide high quality forage and cover for native wildlife species, with an emphasis on bighorn sheep; manage for hunting and other recreational opportunities for the public and access to National Forest lands; and provide a site for wildlife viewing and interpretation.

Objective 1: Prevent soil erosion and conserve and improve the vegetation communities, striving for maximum vegetation diversity dependent on soil type.

**Problem 1:** Noxious weeds have become established on the property.

**Strategy:** Determine the extent and degree of noxious weed problem and implement a weed control program utilizing chemical methods.

**Problem 2:** Boundary fences are incomplete.

**Strategy:** Currently there are no conflicts with trespass livestock. Situation will be monitored and fencing will be proposed when needed.

**Problem 4:** Effects of public access. Increased public access, particularly with respect to vehicles, can result in habitat damage.

**Strategy:** Prohibit off road vehicle use. Restrict vehicle access to established road. Implement seasonal closures consistent with current bighorn winter range closures on adjacent USFS lands. Provide adequate parking facilities and signing To protect soils and vegetation. Cooperate with USFS in relocation of gate on Blue-eyed Nellie Gulch to better manage vehicle access during seasonal Restrictions.

**Problem 5:** There is no formal fire suppression agreement covering the WMA.

**Strategy:** Add the property to the Department's current agreement for fire suppression with the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

**Objective 2:** Manage for wintering bighorn sheep use during short periods of extreme winter conditions and early spring green up; maintain existing non-game species.

**Problem 1:** Noxious weeds have reduced forage availability on a portion of the property.

**Strategy:** Implement weed management program of chemical weed control to restore native grasslands.

**Problem 2:** The Gun Club property represents only a portion of this critical habitat that is not in public ownership.

**Strategy:** Pursue acquisition options with Southern Cross, L.L.C. (approximately 230 acres – north of Gun Club) and North Lily Mining (59.3 acres – north of Gun Club). Pursue easement options on property east of Gun Club with Wayne Ternes (donation) and Vuicich family. These properties would be managed in conjunction with the Gun Club property.

**Objective 3:** Provide for public hunting and recreation.

Problem 1: The bighorn winter range in Blue-eyed Nellie Gulch on USFS lands is closed to vehicular access from October 15 to June 15. The main gate for this road closure is located on the Forest boundary up Blue-eyed Nellie Gulch. Chronic problems with littering, trespass and vandalism have occurred in the past.

Strategy: The Gun Club property provides a good opportunity to work with the USFS to relocate the gate in a highly visible site and improve vehicular access control during the seasonal closure.

Problem 2: Public access to adjacent USFS lands. The Blue-eyed Nellie road is not a declared county road.

Strategy: Acquisition of the Gun Club property would place the lower portion of this road from its junction with Cable Road in public ownership.

Problem 3: Wildlife viewing and interpretation opportunities have been restricted due to lack of public property along Highway 1 and Cable Road.

Strategy: Provide a parking area for access during seasonal closures and wildlife viewing. Pursue joint interpretative signing and displays with the USFS regarding the Lost Creek bighorn sheep population and habitat.

## **MONITORING**

Management Actions: Management actions will be evaluated through the MEPA process.

Vegetation: Vegetation transects may be established with the guidance of the Department's plant ecologist. These transects will aim to determine species composition, plant succession, and forage production. Transects will be monitored on a regular basis to determine long-term trends.

Population: Ground and aircraft surveys will monitor numbers of bighorn sheep annually. Seasonal use will be monitored during periods of extreme weather conditions and spring green up.

Public use: Public use will be determined by public contact. This information will be used to determine travel and seasonal restrictions.

**SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT**

**LONG PROPERTY  
(BLUE-EYED NELLIE WEST)**

**FEE TITLE ACQUISITION**

**MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS**

Prepared by  
Rob Brooks  
June 2005



## I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature (MCA 87-1-241 and MCA 87-1-242), authorizes Montana Fish, Wildlife & 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 socio-economic 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 socio-economic evaluation addresses the fee title purchase of property presently owned by the John Long. The report addresses the physical and institutional setting as well as the social and economic impacts associated with the proposed fee title acquisition.

## II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

### A. Property Description

The Long property is located about five miles from Anaconda, Montana in Deerlodge County. The property that MFWP would acquire encompasses approximately 96 acres in the Warm Springs drainage close to the Garrity Mountain and Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Areas. A detailed description of this property is included in the environmental assessment (EA).

### B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations

Vegetation consists of native and introduced grasses, native forbs, juniper, and Douglas fir. Grassland is the predominant habitat. Bighorn sheep use the land intensively- mule deer and whitetail deer also use this property intermittently. A variety of small mammals and birds found in grassland and juniper habitat also use this land.

### C. Current Use:

The land is currently not used for livestock grazing or other activities.

### D. Management Alternatives:

- 1) Purchase of the property fee title by MFWP
- 2) No purchase

Alternative 1, the fee title purchase would provide long-term protection of the native habitats and protect key habitat that the Lost Creek bighorn sheep herd use extensively from November to March.

The second alternative, the no purchase option, does not guarantee the protection of this parcel from development that would negatively impact wildlife habitat and the bighorn sheep and the other wildlife that use the property.

#### **MFWP Fee Title Purchase**

The intent of the Long land purchase is to protect and enhance the wildlife habitat currently found on the property especially for the Lost Creek bighorn sheep herd.

#### **No Purchase Alternative**

This alternative requires some assumptions since use and management of the property would vary depending on what the current owners decide to do with the property if this transaction does not happen. However, properties in this area are actively being developed and John Long has received offers to purchase this land. The economic impacts associated with this alternative have not been calculated.

### **III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS**

Section II identified the management alternatives this report addresses. The fee title purchase would provide long-term protection of important wildlife habitat, 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 transfer to MFWP and discuss the impacts on tax revenues to local government.

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

#### **A. Financial Impacts**

The financial impacts to MFWP are related to the purchase and maintenance/management costs associated with managing this land. Habitat Montana funds would be used to cover the purchase price of \$300,000. This property would be managed as part of the existing Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area.

The financial impacts to local governments are the potential changes in tax revenues resulting from the fee title purchase. The Long sale by MFWP would not change the tax revenues that Deerlodge County currently collects on this piece of property. MFWP is required by Montana Code 87-1-603 to pay "to the county 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.” The property is currently classified as agricultural land and this classification would not change under MFWP ownership.

**B. Economic Impacts:**

The fee title purchase would not impact local businesses in any significant way. Currently there are no agricultural practices occurring on the property and wildlife associated activities would not change substantially assuming ownership by MFWP.

**FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

As noted at the beginning of this document, the Long is located in Deerlodge County near Anaconda, Montana.

The fee title purchase by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks would provide long term protection for wildlife habitat for bighorn sheep and other wildlife, maintain the open space integrity of the land, and ensure public recreation opportunities. The fee title purchase and title transfer to MFWP would not reduce tax revenues collected on this property from their current levels to Deerlodge County under Montana Code 97-1-603. This purchase would also not have any significant financial impacts on local businesses.