



Region 2 Headquarters
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804-3101
February 15, 2006

- *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
 - Montana Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep, Attn: Tom Powers, POB 17731, Missoula, MT 59808-7731
 - Landowners adjacent to Blue-eyed Nellie WMA and/or "North Lily" properties
- *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 40.0-acre and a 19.23-acre parcel ("North Lily properties") west of Anaconda in Deer Lodge County. The Montana Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep currently owns the North Lily properties, which lay adjacent to and a quarter-mile north of MFWP's existing Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area (WMA). If acquired the property would become part of the Blue-eyed Nellie 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 March 15 (Wednesday) at 6:30 p.m. at the Ancient Order of the Hibernarians Hall (110 Cherry Street, Anaconda, across from Hardee's) to discuss this proposed acquisition and take public comment.

Beginning February 16, 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 March 17, 2006. Comments should be mailed to Ray Vinkey, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1115 West Fourth Street, Anaconda, MT 59711 or emailed to 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 on March 22nd. 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 April 20 meeting in Helena.

Sincerely,

Mack Long
Regional Supervisor

ML/sr

Enclosure: Blue-eyed Nellie WMA North Lily Property Draft EA, Draft Management Plan, and Draft Socioeconomic Assessment



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

Region 2 Headquarters
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804-3
February 17, 2006

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LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL
POLICY OFFICE

- *Governor's Office, Attn: Mike Volesky, PO Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801
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Montana Stockgrowers, 420 N. California, Helena, MT 59601

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Landowners adjacent to Blue-eyed Nellie WMA and/or "North Lily" properties

*Mailed electronically

Dear Interested Citizen:

Reference: **Change in location of the public meeting for the North Lily property acquisition**

On February 15th, we sent you a letter and copy of the Draft Environmental Assessment for a Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) proposal to acquire the "North Lily properties," west of Anaconda in Deer Lodge County, for inclusion in the Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area.

This letter is to let you know that **the location of the public meeting** (to discuss this proposed acquisition and take public comment) **has changed**. The public hearing will still be in Anaconda on March 15 (Wednesday) at 6:30 p.m., but now it will be held **at MFWP's Washoe Fish Hatchery at 600 West Pennsylvania Street** in Anaconda. We apologize for any inconvenience this change may have caused.

Sincerely,

Mack Long
Regional Supervisor

ML/sr

PROPOSED PROPERTY ACQUISITION

BLUE-EYED NELLIE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

NORTH LILY PROPERTY



Bighorn Ram (photo by Canadian Rockies Tours Photo Gallery)

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



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

INTRODUCTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (MFWP) invites the public to comment on this proposal to acquire three mining claims--the Railroad and Manilla Placers (40 acres total) and the Roosevelt Placer (19.23 acres), together called the "North Lily property" (located west of Anaconda, Deer Lodge County, Montana)--from the Montana Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep (MFNAWS) for \$25,000. The Foundation purchased the property from the North Lily Mining Company for \$60,000 and is willing to transfer ownership to MFWP for less than half of its cost. The Anaconda Sportsmen's Association will pay \$5000 to MFNAWS towards purchase this property.

The Railroad and Manilla claims are adjacent to the existing 6.27-acre Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area (WMA), and the Roosevelt claim lies less than a quarter mile from the WMA and from a recent addition to the WMA of 96.26 acres purchased from John Long ("Long property"). Blue-eyed Nellie WMA was purchased in 2000 to provide vital winter range for bighorn sheep. The addition of the North Lily parcels to the WMA would preserve additional winter range and assure public access to Blue-eyed Nellie Gulch.

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. Anaconda's West Valley and private lands between Anaconda and Georgetown Lake are being rapidly developed. The North Lily property was purchased by MFNAWS in order to prevent an interested private buyer from purchasing the property, building a home, closing access to Blue-eyed Nellie Gulch, and compromising bighorn sheep habitat.

MFNAWS purchased the land with the understanding that MFWP would reimburse MFNAWS for part of the cost and take possession of the property as soon as possible. Since extensive development has occurred in the immediate area within the last 5 years (the Haffney and the West Park Number One and Two subdivisions), and the North Lily property was under immediate threat, MFNAWS and MFWP agreed to secure the habitat with MFNAWS acting as a bridge party. If MFWP is not able to purchase the land from MFNAWS, the Foundation may be forced to sell the parcel, which would be expected to leave the land vulnerable to development. If completed, the purchase by MFWP would preserve bighorn habitat, assure public access to Stucky Ridge, and reimburse a partner in conservation (MFNAWS) that made this transaction possible.

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 come from combined revenue from the auction of a bighorn sheep license (MCA 87-2-722), a donation of \$30,000 by MFNAWS, and a \$5,000 contribution from the Anaconda Sportsmen's Association. An environmental assessment (EA) is required to analyze the environmental impacts of this proposal.

The Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission is the decision-making authority for land purchase proposals by MFWP. The Commission gave preliminary approval to pursue this purchase during its December 8, 2005 meeting. The proposed sale price is less than \$100,000, so the Montana Board of Land Commissioners will not need to review this proposal. After the public comment period closes, MFWP will release a recommended decision and that recommendation will be reviewed by the MFWP Commission, which will approve or deny the sale.

Area Description and Description of Resources

The Railroad and Manilla placers are at the mouth of Blue-eyed Nellie Gulch (Township 5N, Range 12W, SW1/4 of Section 24), and the Roosevelt placer is a quarter-mile west (Township 5N, Range 12W, SE1/4 of Section 23). These claims are located 5 miles northwest of the town of Anaconda (Fig. 1) in the Warm Springs drainage and close to substantial state and federal land holdings, including MFWP's Garrity Mountain WMA (south of Montana Highway 1), Blue-eyed Nellie WMA, and US Forest Service (USFS) lands (Fig. 2 and 3).

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

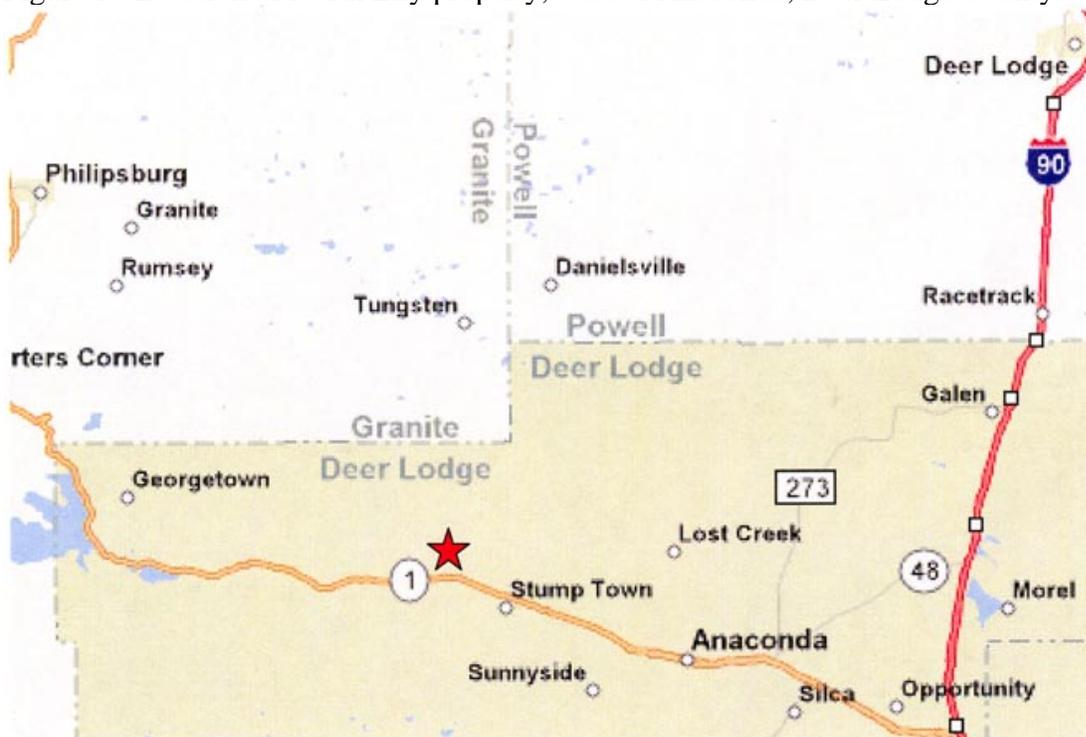


Figure 2. North Lily property and surrounding ownership. Red is North Lily property (western portion is Roosevelt placer; eastern portion is Railroad & Manilla placers) proposed for inclusion in MFWP's current (yellow) Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area (WMA); green is US Forest Service (USFS); tan was formerly US BLM, now USFS; blue is MFWP's Garrity Mountain WMA; white is private land.

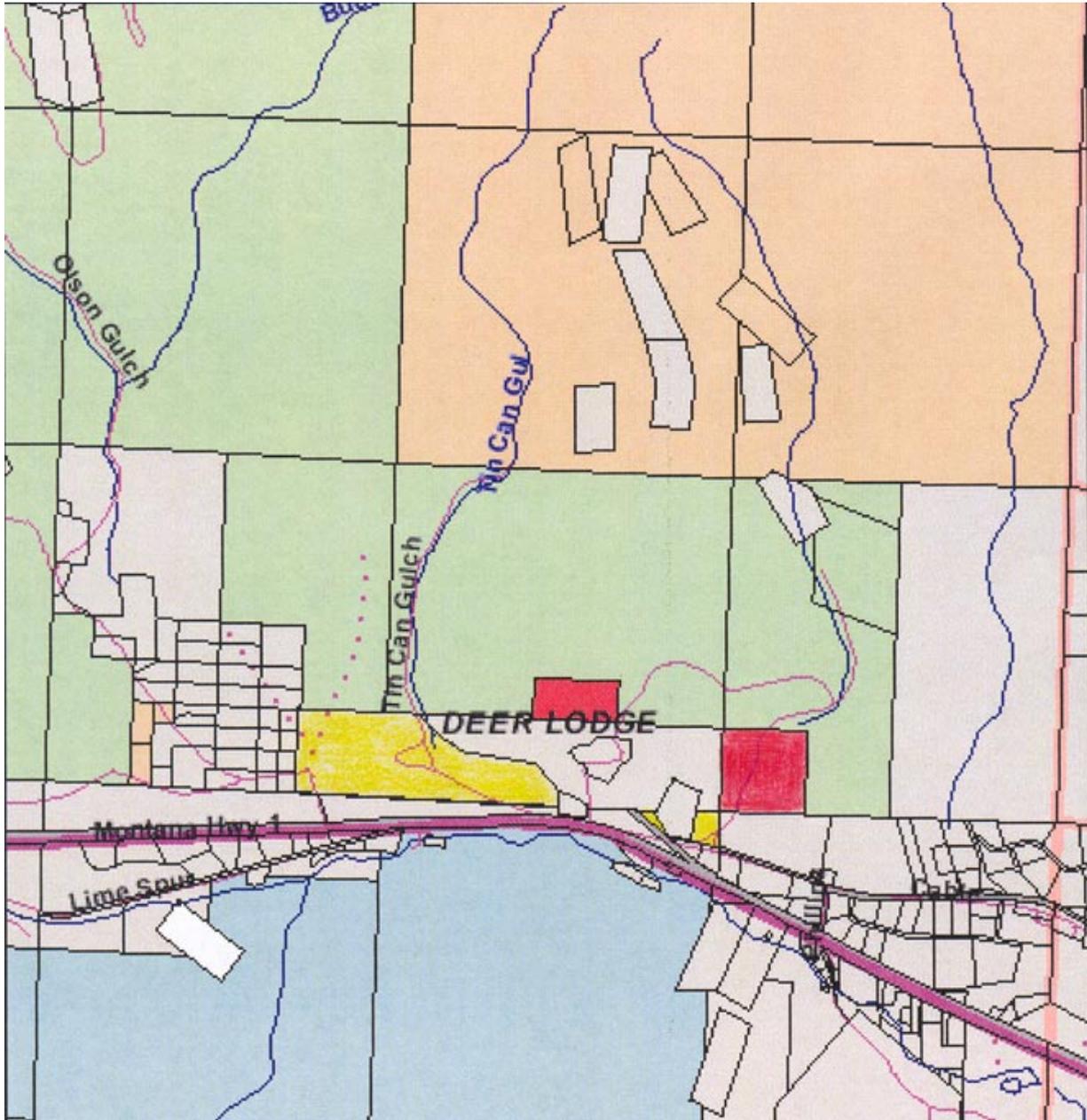
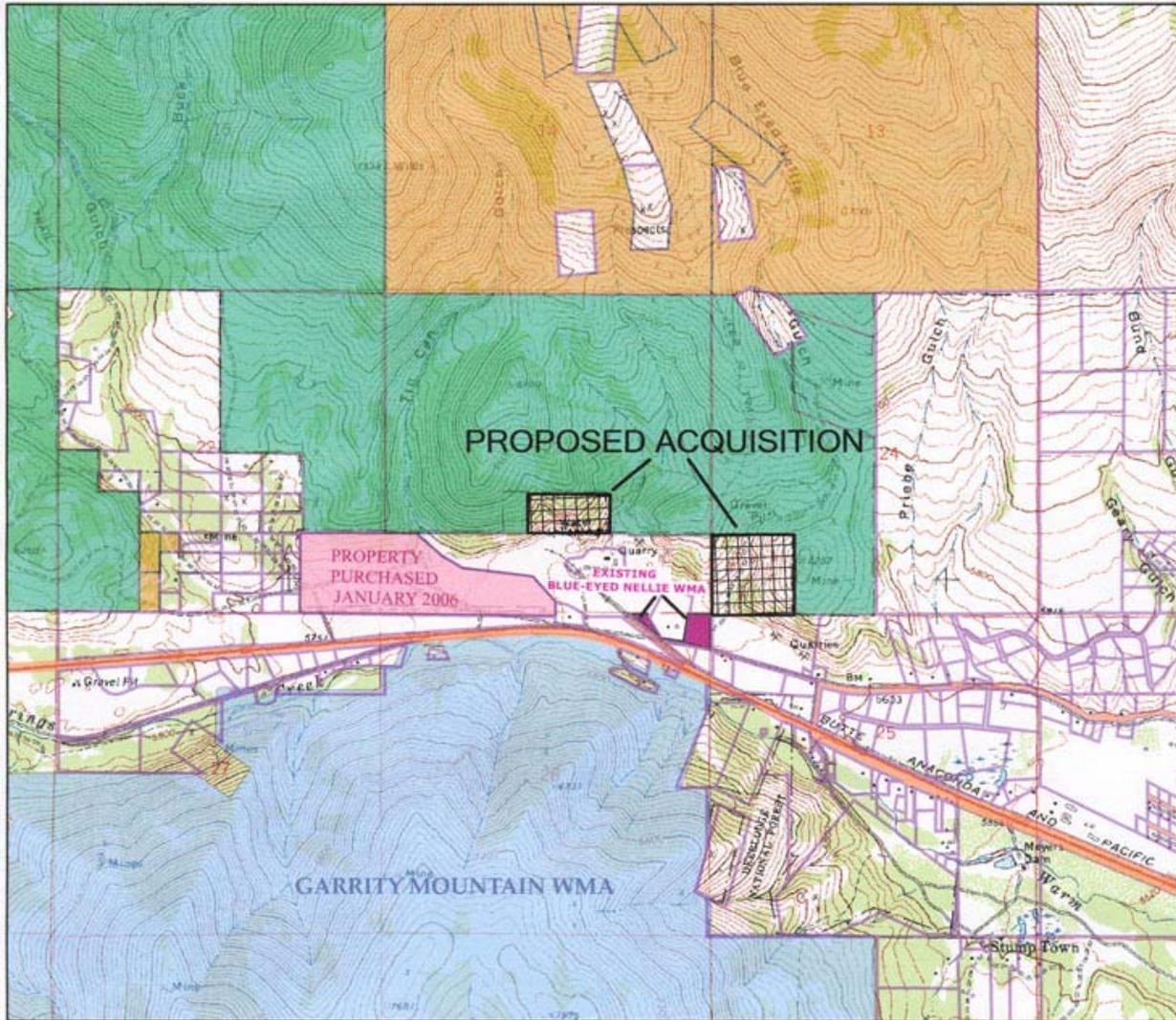


Figure 3. Topographic map of MFWP’s Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area (BNWMA) and vicinity. Purple is BNWMA; pink is recently acquired “Long property” portion of BNWMA; cross-hatching is proposed North Lily addition to BNWMA (western portion is Roosevelt placer; eastern portion is Railroad & Manilla placers); blue-green is US Forest Service (USFS); tan was formerly US BLM, now USFS; blue is MFWP’s Garry Mountain WMA; white is private land.



Significant land exchanges have been completed in the immediate area: 1) the Forest Service completed the Lost Creek Land Exchange which covers 14,000 acres adjoining the North Lily 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 Mountain WMA in 2002; and 3) the Forest Service obtained the 25,000-acre “Watershed” property between Garry Mountain WMA and Georgetown Lake in 2002. On January 11, 2006 MFWP took

possession of the 96-acre Long property. If the North Lily purchase is approved, it and the Long parcel will add almost 160 acres to the formerly 6-acre Blue-eyed Nellie WMA.

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*). The property is rocky with prominent cliffs on the Roosevelt Placer, and Blue-eyed Nellie Gulch runs through the middle of the Railroad and Manilla Placers. Spotted knapweed (*Centaurea maculosa*) has invaded the site. No standing or perennial water exists on the properties. Bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*) use the parcels intensively; the site also receives intermittent use by mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), birds and small mammals.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action is for MFWP to acquire fee title for 59.23-acres owned by MFNAWS for the cost of \$25,000, partially from the Capital Sheep Acquisition Fund. This property would be managed in conjunction with the nearby Blue-eyed Nellie WMA and the recently acquired Long property. All regulations pertinent to the Blue-eyed Nellie WMA (see Management Plan, Appendix A) would apply to the North Lily parcels, and all would be managed as one unit. Benefits of the proposed action would include conservation of wildlife habitat, avoidance of potential conflicts between people and wildlife, control of invasive weeds, preservation of key habitat for bighorn sheep, and assuring public access to public lands. The Lost Creek bighorn sheep herd and the public would directly benefit from this purchase. Hunting and observation of this herd provide significant revenue and pride to the local community.

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 potential residential subdivision and/or other commercial practices. Since MFNAWS needs to recoup its funds from this purchase, a conservation easement or lease are not feasible alternatives.

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 North Lily property. Nearby residential sites, a gravel pit, and historic mining activity limit wildlife use to species, like bighorn, which 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 could indirectly

benefit bull trout by precluding installation of septic systems associated with development and associated nutrient input into Warm Springs.

Alternative A (no action): This alternative would not preclude future development of the site. If development occurs and a septic system(s) is (are) installed on the MFNAWS property, water quality in Warm Springs Creek (half a mile to the south) and bull trout could be impacted. The “no action” alternative is unlikely to impact other threatened or endangered species, and impacts to bull trout would be limited.

Species of Concern

Westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarki lewisi*) is a Montana Species of Special Concern that resides in Warm Springs Creek. Warm Springs Creek lies half a mile to the south and it is possible, though unlikely, that activities on site could adversely affect westslope cutthroat trout. The proposed action would assure that trout would not be impacted by potential development of the property. No other sensitive species are known to inhabit the property, nearby lands or streams.

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

Wildlife General

The proposed action would protect wildlife habitat in Anaconda's west valley. Wildlife that use the North Lily parcels include bighorn sheep from the Lost Creek herd (around 200 sheep), mule deer, and a variety of other mammals and birds. The property is key habitat for bighorn sheep.

Bighorn sheep use the property consistently; ewes, lambs, and rams use the property to varying degrees throughout the year. Ewes use the cliffs above Blue-eyed Nellie Gulch for lambing, rams rut in the area, and sheep forage year-round, especially during periods of severe winter weather and during the spring green-up. In winter it is common to see 100 bighorn between Olsen and Blue-eyed Nellie Gulches. It would substantially benefit the herd if the Roosevelt, Manilla, and Roosevelt Placers are bought and combined into the Blue-eyed Nellie WMA.

Alternative A (no action): This alternative 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 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 at this site would eliminate winter forage, displace the bighorn sheep, and increase conflicts between wildlife, people, and domestic animals. The cumulative impact of these stresses on bighorn could include higher individual mortality, reduced lamb production, increased habitat fragmentation, and greater odds of disease related die-offs.

Fisheries general

Since there is no perennial water on site the proposal would have no direct impact to fisheries. If developed, one or more septic systems on the 59.23 acres could lead indirectly to nutrient input to Warm Springs Creek. Implementation of this proposal would forgo this impact.

Alternative A (no action): The current condition and its potential negative impacts would be retained under Alternative A.

Wetlands and Riparian Habitats

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

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

Vegetation, Forest and Fire Management

Native vegetation onsite is composed of species associated with intermountain grassland and shrub grassland, including bunchgrasses, sagebrush, rabbit brush, and juniper. Spotted knapweed infestations occur. Weed control is part of the Blue-eyed Nellie WMA management plan and would occur here if the proposal were implemented. Control of weeds would benefit native vegetation and wildlife. Active forest management is not necessary because only a few scrubby trees exist. If necessary, fire suppression would occur on Blue-eyed Nellie WMA in accordance with an agreement with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

Alternative A (no action): Under this alternative impacts to vegetation would depend on the actions of the owner or future buyers. If developed, the extent and diversity of native vegetation may 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 with a seasonal closure to motor vehicles from October 15 to June 15. 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 would be incorporated into the design of the WMA. The Lost Creek herd provides over 200 hunter days as well as revenue associated with hunter use of the area. Trophy bighorn rams are consistently harvested from this herd. 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 property, and the steep nature of the property makes it of limited utility for domestic stock. If purchased, livestock grazing would be prohibited in order to assure maximum forage production for wild ungulates and to minimize contact between wild and domestic animals. Because of the high risk to bighorn sheep from pathogens transmitted from domestic sheep and goats, a guarantee that such 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 potentially graze livestock--including sheep or goats--on this parcel. The impact of this grazing on vegetation would depend on the intensity of use. Risks to wild bighorn from disease transmission would not be curtailed.

Air and Water Quality

The proposed alternative 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, then development could impact air and/or water quality. Septic systems could be installed as part of development, and leaching of nutrients from these systems can impact water quality.

Historic and Cultural Resources

There are no known significant historic or cultural resources in the area, and the proposed alternative would not destroy or alter any site, structure or object of historic importance. The Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) is being contacted during the EA comment period to determine if it has records of significant cultural resources on the property.

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

Land Use, Neighboring Landowners and Local Community

Under the proposed action the land would remain undeveloped, and no commercial activities, grazing or timber harvest would occur. Sale of the property to MFWP would retain open space as well as the rural character of the area. The public would retain opportunities to view and photograph sheep in the area, and hunting and hunting access would be retained for hunters. 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 could include one or more home sites. 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. The land would remain taxable as agricultural and commercial land, but not as residential land. MFWP would make payments in lieu of taxes to the county (see the Socio-Economic Report).

Alternative A (no action): This alternative would allow for potential development and additional tax revenue if development were to be approved by the County Commissioners. 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. Addition of the North Lily property to the Blue-eyed Nellie WMA would preserve public access, wildlife habitat and viewing opportunities, and contribute to the long-term health and survival of the Lost Creek bighorn sheep herd by protecting important year-round habitat. 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 could result in residential and/or commercial development and cumulative adverse impacts to the environment. Wildlife habitat could be lost, and revenue associated with viewing and hunting the bighorn could 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 North Lily property will begin with the availability of this EA for public review and comment. The availability of this EA for public review will be advertised in newspapers (*Anaconda Ledger*, *Missoulian*, and *Helena Independent Record*), 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.mt.gov>). A 30-day public review period will run from February 16 to March 17, 2006. Public comment must be received not later than 5:00 p.m. on March 17 to ensure inclusion in the decision-making process.

A public hearing will be held in Anaconda on March 15, 6:30 p.m., at the Ancient Order of the Hibernarians Hall (AOH; at 110 Cherry Street).

After reviewing public input, 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 April 20, 2006 at MFWP Headquarters, in Helena.

Comments should be addressed to Ray Vinkey; Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; 1115 West Fourth Street; Anaconda, MT 59711 (406-563-5668; rvinkey@mt.gov).

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 W. Fourth St.
Anaconda, Montana 59711
Phone 406-563-5668
Email rvinkey@mt.gov

Appendix A.

MANAGEMENT PLAN
BLUE-EYED NELLIE
WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
NORTH LILY PROPERTY

The North Lily property is adjacent to and quarter mile of Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area (WMA). If acquired by MFWP the property will expand the 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.

Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area Management Plan

INTRODUCTION

The original Blue-eyed Nellie acquisition involved 6.27 acres north of Cable Road in Township 5 N, Range 12 W, Section 26. It was 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 lands adjoin 12,000 acres recently acquired by the U.S. Forest Service through the Lost Creek land exchange.

The purpose of these acquisitions is to provide critical winter range for bighorn sheep, retain the connectivity of habitats north and south of Highway 1, and to retain public access to Blue-eyed Nellie Gulch. The properties provide an area for a joint MFWP/USFS development of a public watchable wildlife area and interpretive site. They also allow for public access management during critical periods by providing seasonal vehicle closures. The site has historically provided important administrative use during bighorn trapping and transplanting operations.

Area Description

The original Blue-eyed Nellie WMA was composed of about 6-acres located north of Cable Road approximately 5 miles west of Anaconda. This WMA was increased in January of 2006 by the addition of the 96-acre Long Property and may expand further if purchase of an additional 59 acres is approved. The properties include open grassland, scrublands, and cliffs in the Warm Springs Creek Valley at 5,267 feet elevation. A small grove of cottonwoods occurs on the original WMA, which is divided into two parcels of approximately of 2 and 4 acres with the Anaconda Gun Club in the middle. Landowners in the west valley include the United States Forest Service, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, and a number of private parties.

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 biological and chemical control.

Problem 2: Boundary fences are incomplete.

Strategy: Currently there are no conflicts with trespass livestock, but fences should be maintained to regulate motor vehicle access.

Problem 3: Effects of public access. Increased public access, particularly with respect to vehicles, can result in habitat damage.

Strategy: Prohibit off road vehicle use. Ongoing illegal motor vehicle trespass and garbage dumping on lands between Blue-eyed Nellie Gulch and Tin Can Gulch present a management challenge. Clean-up of garbage and realignment of fences are necessary to address these issues. Vehicle access should be restricted to established roads. 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.

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 using biological and chemical weed control to restore native grasslands.

Problem 2: The Blue-eyed Nellie WMA represents only a portion of critical habitat that is not in public ownership.

Strategy: Pursue acquisition options with the Atlantic Richfield Company and the Moore family. Complete an acquisition from Wayne Ternes (donation). These properties would be managed in conjunction with the Blue-eyed Nellie WMA.

Objective 3: Provide for public hunting and recreation.

Problem 1: Public access to adjacent USFS lands must be maintained. The Blue-eyed Nellie road is not a declared county road and there is not a public easement through the North Lily property in Township 5 N, Range 12 W, Section 24.

Strategy: Acquisition of the North Lily property and one acre from Wayne Ternes would make the road public from North Cable Road to the Forest Service boundary.

Problem 2: Wildlife viewing and interpretation opportunities have been restricted due to lack of public property along Highway 1 and Cable Road.

Strategy: Provide parking areas 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; 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 winter 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

NORTH LILY PROPERTY

FEE TITLE ACQUISITION

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

Prepared by
Rob Brooks
February 3, 2006



I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature and reauthorized by the 2005 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 Montana Chapter of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep (MFNAWS) and previously owned by the North Lily Mining Company. 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 North Lily property is located about five miles from Anaconda, Montana in Deerlodge County. The property that MFWP would acquire encompasses approximately 60 acres in the Warm Springs drainage close to the Garrity Mountain Wildlife Management Area and adjacent to the Blue-eyed Nellie Wildlife Management Area. 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 also use this property intermittently. A variety of small mammals and birds 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 year-round.

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 North Lily 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 because the 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. Properties in this area are actively being developed. 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, maintenance, and management costs associated with managing this land. Bighorn sheep license auction funds would be used to cover the purchase price of \$25,000. 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. Sale of the North Lily property to 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 and commercial land and this classification would not change under MFWP ownership. The taxes in 2005 were approximately \$1600.

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 North Lily property is located in Deerlodge County near Anaconda, Montana.

The fee title purchase by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks would provide long-term protection for wildlife habitat used by 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 87-1-603. This purchase would also not have any significant financial impacts on local businesses.