

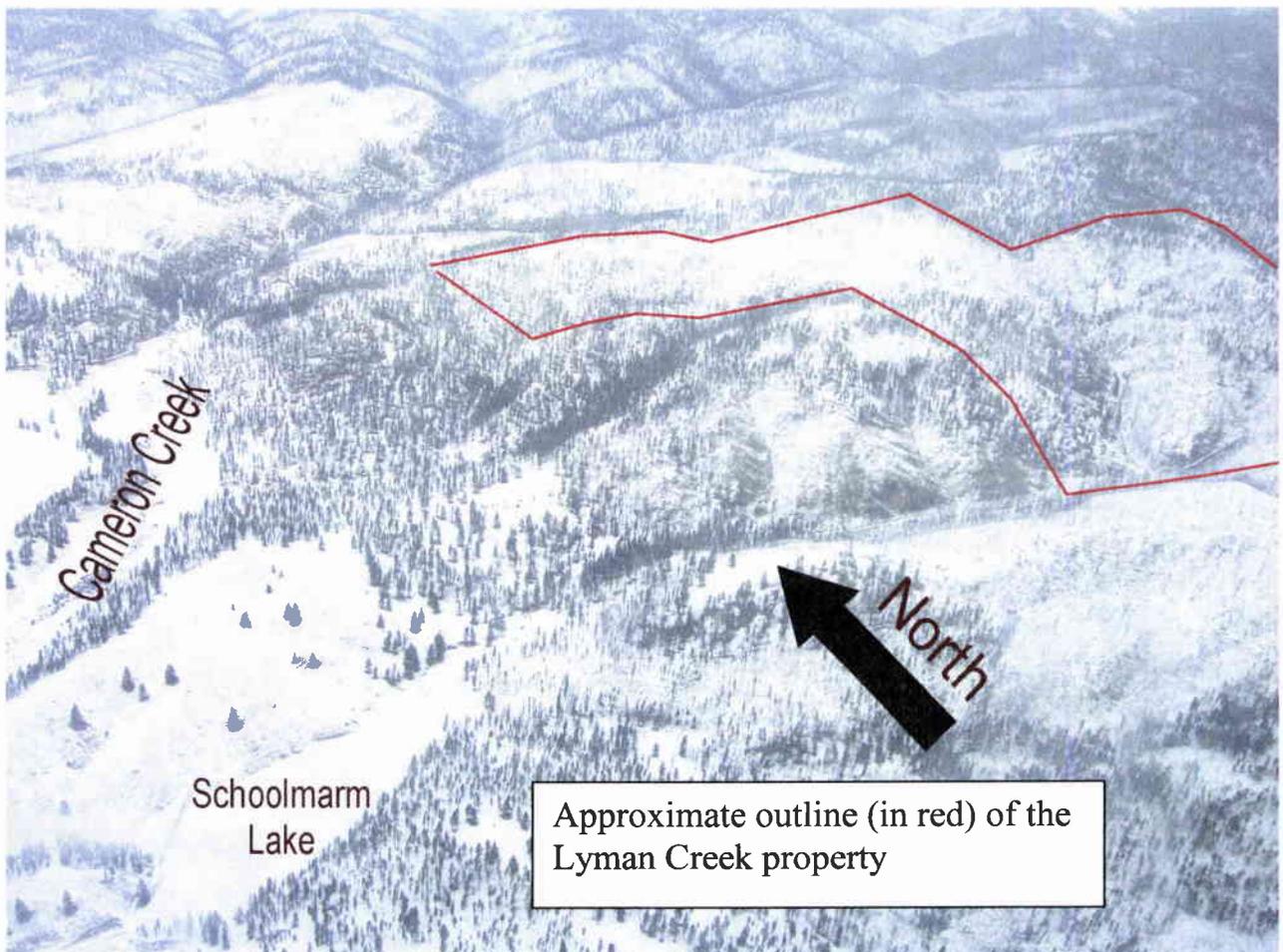
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Lyman Creek Project
Draft Environmental Assessment
October 12, 2006

STATE ENVIRONMENTAL
POLICY OFFICE

A proposal by *Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks* to purchase 367.92 acres in French Basin and later exchange the property with DNRC for inholdings in the Calf Creek and Threemile Wildlife Management Areas



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INTRODUCTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) invites the public to comment on the proposed purchase of a privately owned 367.92-acre tract of land near Lyman Creek within the Sula State Forest and the Bitterroot National Forest. The land would be purchased using funds provided by the Habitat Montana Program (administered by FWP) with additional financial assistance from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF). Habitat Montana funds would provide \$625,500.00 (the current appraised value). RMEF currently holds an option to purchase the Lyman Creek property from the Wetzsteon family because it was able to move quickly to secure this important parcel of private land when it became available on the market and hold it until FWP could arrange for its purchase and later exchange. RMEF is only holding the option on the property for a short time.

The Lyman Creek property is on the east side of French Basin within the principal winter range of about 1,000 elk and several hundred mule and white-tailed deer. It is bordered on the north, south and west by the Sula State Forest, and on the northeast and east by the U.S. Forest Service.

The Wetzsteon family currently owns this property with RMEF holding an option to purchase the land from them with the expressed intent of later selling it to FWP. If the proposed action is approved and the land is acquired by FWP, the property would be exchanged with DNRC for tracts of equal value located within and adjacent to the Calf Creek and Threemile Wildlife Management Areas. Once in DNRC ownership the Lyman Creek property would be accessible to the public and managed by DNRC. Although a full exchange analysis is not a part of this EA, FWP wants to make it clear at this time that it is FWP's intention that the Lyman Creek property would later be exchanged for DNRC inholdings of equal value on the Calf Creek and Threemile Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). A separate environmental analysis consistent with DNRC land exchange policies will be provided to the public describing this future exchange between the two state agencies.

The land FWP would receive in exchange from the DNRC includes a 160-acre inholding on the Calf Creek WMA (CCWMA) and an 80-acre inholding plus some or all of an adjacent 640-acre parcel on the Threemile WMA (TMWMA) depending upon appraised values. FWP already has considerable investment in these two Bitterroot Valley WMAs and in the Brown Valley and Bolin Ranches conservation easements near the Threemile WMA. Completion of this exchange would help realize a long-standing goal of consolidating ownership and management. Acquired lands would be managed for deer, elk and other wildlife under the existing WMA management plans. FWP would manage public access and recreation in keeping with traditional FWP practices on both WMAs. Complete management plans for the CCWMA and TMWMA are available from FWP at the Region 2 office in Missoula, and pertinent excerpts and highlights are described in Appendix A.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the proposed purchase and later exchange is twofold. First is to protect 367.92 acres of privately owned elk winter range in French Basin from development by putting it into public ownership. Hunters and other recreationists would benefit from the resulting access to a

valuable parcel for hunting, which is surrounded by USFS and DNRC public land. Secondly, once the property is owned by FWP and exchanged with DNRC for inholdings on the CCWMA and TMWMA it would consolidate FWP ownership and management on these WMAs

This project is needed because of the benefits to wildlife and the public of putting the Lyman Creek property into public ownership, and because FWP has no management authority over DNRC inholdings within TMWMA and CCWMA, except FWP does currently lease DNRC's 160 acres within the Calf Creek WMA for grazing administration. Once the Lyman Creek property is acquired, the subsequent land exchange will simplify administration on the WMAs and expand the scope of habitat management activities like weed control, road management, livestock grazing, habitat improvement, timber treatments, etc. It would also simplify boundaries for administration and recreationists and permanently protect those properties acquired through the exchange from possible activities that could negatively impact wildlife.

Support for the proposed purchase of the Lyman Creek property and subsequent land exchange for inholdings in CCWMA and TMWMA is found in the management plans for those WMAs.

From the Calf Creek WMA draft management plan (revised 1997):

Goal: FWP strives to maintain and enhance native plant communities on Calf Creek WMA as habitat for a diversity of wildlife species and populations, with emphasis on elk winter ranges. Secondly, FWP strives to provide hunting and other outdoor recreational opportunities for the public, and manage recreation in a manner that avoids conflict with the overriding purpose of providing elk winter habitat.

Objectives:

- Maintain and enhance native sagebrush-grasslands and forests
- Provide space, cover and natural forage to support 200 elk through winter and early spring
- Recognize habitat values on neighboring private lands and impacts of WMA management on neighboring landowners. Develop and enhance cooperative working relations with neighbors.
- Develop regulations that enhance recreational opportunities for which Calf Creek WMA is uniquely suited and recognized: hiking, horseback riding, and walk-in hunting for elk and deer.

From the Threemile WMA management plan (revised 1992):

Goals: Restore and sustain the natural productivity of the ponderosa pine/bunchgrass/riparian ecotone extending from Threemile Creek to Ambrose Creek, including Threemile WMA and adjacent ownerships, to retain a wide variety of potential management alternatives for future generations. ...provide

high-quality winter range for elk and mule deer, as well as compatible public recreational opportunities.

Objectives:

- Control noxious weeds in all nonforested areas and along open roads, and prevent infestations in weed-free areas.
- Maintain and enhance native plant communities, emphasizing bunchgrass, ponderosa pine, and riparian communities.
- Create a partnership for elk management and land stewardship with affected, adjacent private landowners.
- Increase the Threemile WMA elk herd from 130 to 250, and assess the larger herd's relationship to the economic and environmental carrying capacities of the winter range.
- Manage public access to provide a diversity of wildlife-related recreational opportunities and prevent serious conflicts with other objectives.

Purposes specifically addressed by this proposal:

- Permanently protect and expand public investments and progress over the past 50 years toward establishment of effective and secure winter range (i.e., the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs and conservation easements) for elk and deer populations of the Bitterroot Valley.
- Prevent the possibility of irreversible habitat loss if the Lyman Creek property is sold in the future and eventually subdivided or developed.
- Maintain and enhance grassland and forested forage to address a habitat limitation in periods of harsh winter weather for migratory populations of about 1,000 elk and several hundred mule and white-tailed deer in the French Basin area, and roughly 500 elk and several hundred deer associated with the CCWMA and TMWMA.
- Continue to provide and expand access for unlimited numbers of recreationists in hunting districts 204, 261 and 270.
- 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 (MCA 87-1-209). 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 State Land Commissioners (the Land Board) reviews land acquisitions, disposals, or exchanges involving FWP land proposals over 100 acres or \$100,000 in value. FWP's proposed expenditure of \$625,500.00 to

purchase the Lyman Creek property 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 Habitat Montana Program was permanently reauthorized by the 2005 Legislature.

The land to be acquired by FWP through exchange with DNRC in this proposal would be included in the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs, which were 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 these WMAs 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 WMAs. 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 WMAs and other properties. A separate FWP Commission and Land Board approval process will occur once the details of the exchange are finalized assuming the Lyman Creek acquisition is approved and finalized.

Description of Subject Lands and Wildlife Resources (with maps)

All properties involved in the proposed purchase and exchange are in Ravalli County (Fig. 1). The Lyman Creek Property is in south Ravalli County on the east side of French Basin approximately 6 miles northeast of Sula. The Calf Creek WMA is approximately 8 miles east of Hamilton, and the Threemile WMA is approximately 9 miles northeast of Stevensville. A detailed legal description of each of the subject properties is found in Table 1, and habitat and wildlife resources for each are described in more detail below.

Table 1. Description of subject lands, all in Ravalli County

Property	Township	Range	Section	Acres
Lyman Creek property	2N	19W	Section 13: W1/2SW1/4 (80 acres) Section 14: Government Lots 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, SW1/4NE1/4 (267.92 acres)	367.92
DNRC inholding on Calf Creek WMA	6N	19W	Section 16: SE1/4	160.0
DNRC inholdings on Threemile WMA	10N 10N	18W 19W	Section 30: N1/2SE1/4 (80 acres) Section 36: All or a portion depending on appraisal	

The Lyman Creek Property--The Lyman Creek property is 367.92 acres on the east side of French Basin in the southern Bitterroot Valley (Fig. 2). It is a private inholding bordered on the northwest, west and south by DNRC land and on the northeast and east by Forest Service. Elevations range from 4,840 to 5,440 feet on predominately south and southwest aspects. Lyman

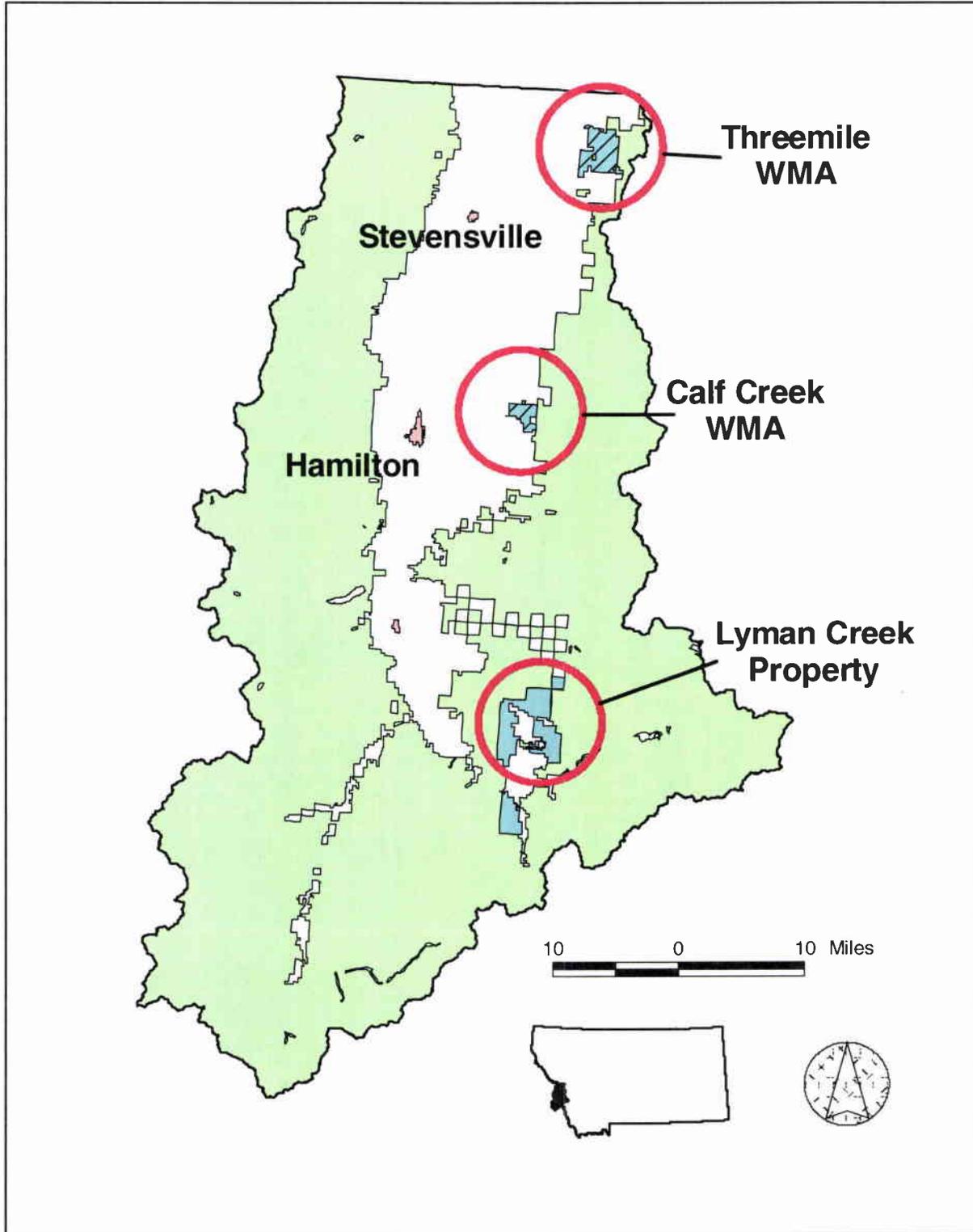


Figure 1. Ravalli County showing the location of the Lyman Creek Property and the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs. Forest Service land is shown as green, DNRC is blue, and FWP's WMAs are crosshatched blue.

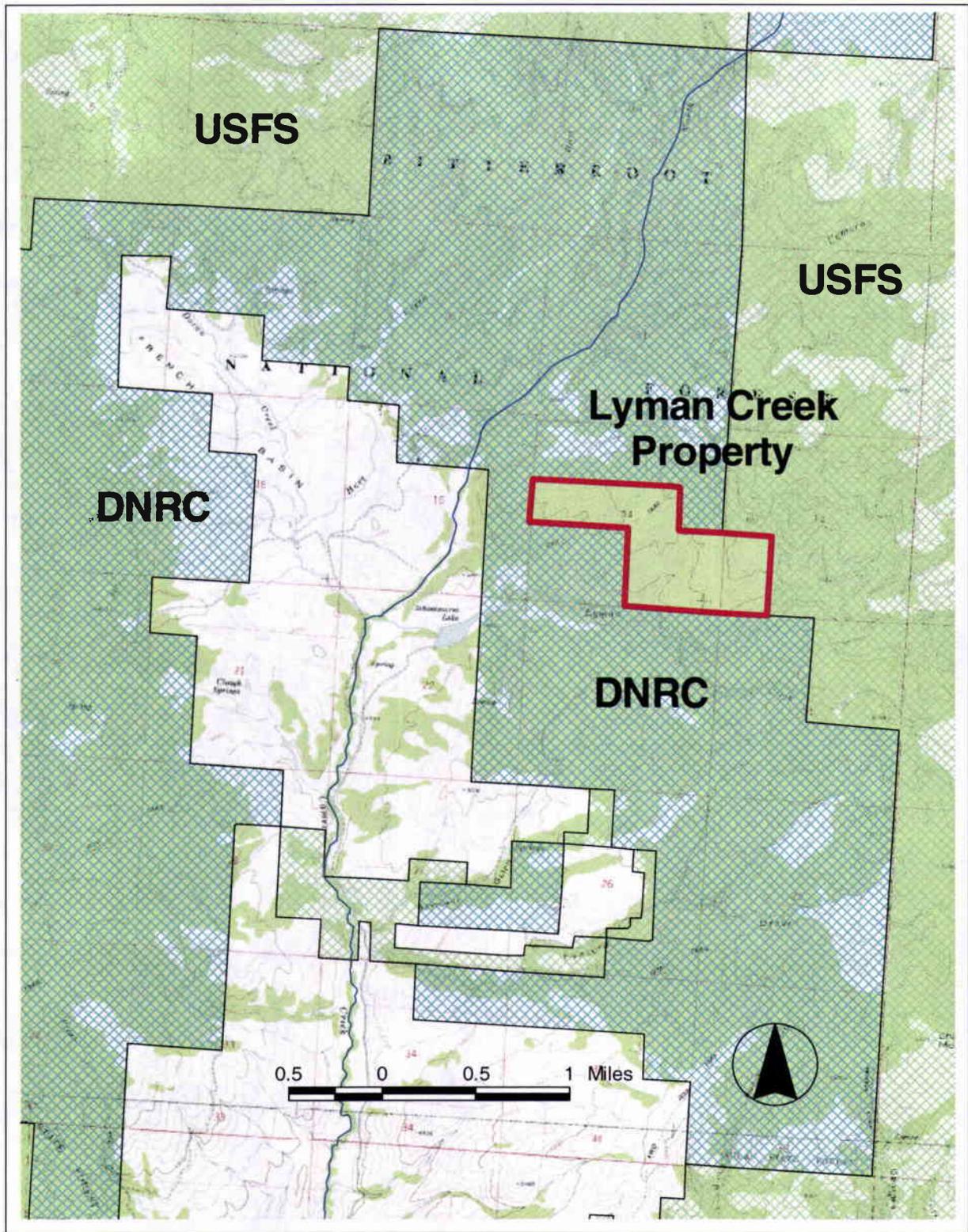


Figure 2. The Lyman Creek Property and surrounding DNRC and Forest Service lands in southern Ravalli County.

Creek flows along a portion of the south boundary and two smaller streams with stretches that may occasionally go dry run through the property and drain into Lyman Creek. Forest habitat is mostly a lodgepole pine type with scattered Douglas fir and some stringers of spruce/fir along small drainages. It currently supports understory grass and early seral forest following either logging or being burned during the extensive Bitterroot forest fires in 2000.

The French Basin area, including the Lyman Creek property, supports the highest density of wintering elk in the Bitterroot Valley--typically 800-1,000 plus several hundred mule and white-tailed deer. Elk, deer and other big game including moose, black bear, and mountain lion are found here year round. There are no known grizzly bears in the French Basin area or using the Lyman Creek property, but it is suitable habitat. The federally listed threatened gray wolf is common, and the property was within the denning home range of the Sleeping Child pack until they were destroyed in August 2006 because of conflicts with livestock. Three other wolf packs--the East Fork, Sula and Divide Creek packs--range to within 5 miles. Other predators include coyote, red fox, bobcat, wolverine, badger and smaller forest carnivores including fisher, marten and weasel. Blue, ruffed and spruce grouse are all found here as well as a host of other birds including black-backed woodpecker and great gray owl.

DNRC inholding in Calf Creek WMA--DNRC owns a 160-acre inholding in the east part of the Calf Creek WMA bordered on the north, west and south by the WMA and on the east by Forest Service (Fig. 3). This tract is currently leased to FWP by DNRC for grazing management. Elevations of this quarter section of land range from 5,200 to 5,920 feet, and aspects vary because of a ridge that runs south to north through it's middle. Roughly the western half is a west aspect while in the eastern half is a small north-flowing creek with adjacent aspects being both east and west. Habitat types on the western half are a mix of open grasslands and scattered mostly second growth Douglas fir and occasional ponderosa pine. On the east half habitat types are similar but with relatively less open grassland, more and denser conifer canopy cover, and some spruce/fir along the creek.

The Calf Creek WMA and surrounding area is an important elk and deer winter range. It is within the Willow Creek to Skalkaho Creek elk survey area where from 529 to 758 elk have been counted during spring census flights over the last 5 years including up to 227 associated with the Calf Creek WMA. Mule and white-tailed deer also winter on Calf Creek but in lesser numbers, about 50 of each species. Just 5 miles south of the Calf Creek WMA is a major mule deer winter range that typically harbors 500-800 mule deer. The WMA is year round habitat for elk and deer as well as other big game including moose, black bear, and mountain lion. There are no known grizzly bears in the area but gray wolves are present. The WMA is within the home range of the Skalkaho Pack of 10+ animals that denned about 4 miles south of the WMA. Coyote, red fox, and bobcat are common and it would not be unusual for an occasional wolverine, lynx and badger to be found there. Smaller forest carnivores include fisher, marten and weasel. Upland game birds include blue, ruffed and spruce grouse, turkey, and an occasional pheasant and gray partridge. Other birds of note are great gray owl, pileated woodpecker and northern goshawk.

DNRC inholdings in Threemile WMA--The importance of the Threemile area as winter range for elk and deer has long been recognized by FWP. The WMA is the nucleus of a complex of

FWP investments in habitat including its purchase of two adjoining Conservation Easements – the 1,904-acre Brown easement in 1995 and the 5,355-acre Bolin Easement in 1997 (Fig. 4).

Two DNRC parcels associated with the Threemile WMA are being considered in this proposal: an 80-acre inholding along the western edge of the WMA and a 640-acre section that abuts the WMAs western boundary (Fig. 4). Neither of these tracts are currently leased to FWP by DNRC. Elevation of the 80-acre piece ranges from 4,400 to 4,610 feet on a western aspect. The forest-grassland ecotone bisects this parcel with roughly its western half in open grassland and the eastern being scattered mostly second growth Douglas fir and occasional ponderosa pine.

The 640-acre section is mostly an open, gently sloping, westerly aspect grassland ranging in elevation from 3,830 to 4,390 feet. Spring Gulch runs along the northern boundary, Wheelbarrow Creek flows east to west through the middle of the section and Grayhorse Creek flows through the southwest corner. Two major ridge complexes favored by deer and elk as winter foraging areas traverse this parcel, one between Spring Gulch and Wheelbarrow Creek and the other between Wheelbarrow and Grayhorse Creeks.

The Threemile WMA and surrounding area provide important winter habitat for about 150-250 elk and a lesser number of mule and white-tailed deer. Some elk and deer can be found here year-round along with moose, black bear and mountain lion. There are no known grizzly bears in the area but gray wolves have been reported. Coyote, red fox, and bobcat are common and it would not be unusual for an occasional wolverine, lynx and badger to be found there. Smaller forest carnivores include fisher, marten and weasel. Upland game birds include blue, ruffed and spruce grouse, turkey, and an occasional pheasant and gray partridge. Other birds of note are great gray owl, pileated woodpecker and northern goshawk.

Problem Synthesis/Rationale

FWP's interest in acquiring the Lyman Creek property and subsequently transferring ownership through an exchange with DNRC is to protect wildlife habitat values of this property in the future and enhance public access. This threat of habitat loss is probable because of a strong market for such properties for either a single recreational buyer or to be divided into smaller acreages for development. In either case, its value as wildlife habitat would be compromised and it is likely that public access would be denied. The potential replacement of elk and deer winter range with houses, fences, driveways, garages, barns, and other structures constitutes a direct loss of winter habitat values for elk and deer 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 surrounding area are predicted causing further displacement of animals. Future residents may put out food to attract wintering deer and elk, which would disrupt natural movements and habitat-use patterns, concentrate animals in a manner that would degrade native habitats, increase the probability of disease transmission, and attract predators like mountain lions that are unwanted near houses. The potential for these impacts to wildlife, as well as lost access and recreational opportunities for the general public, would increase as

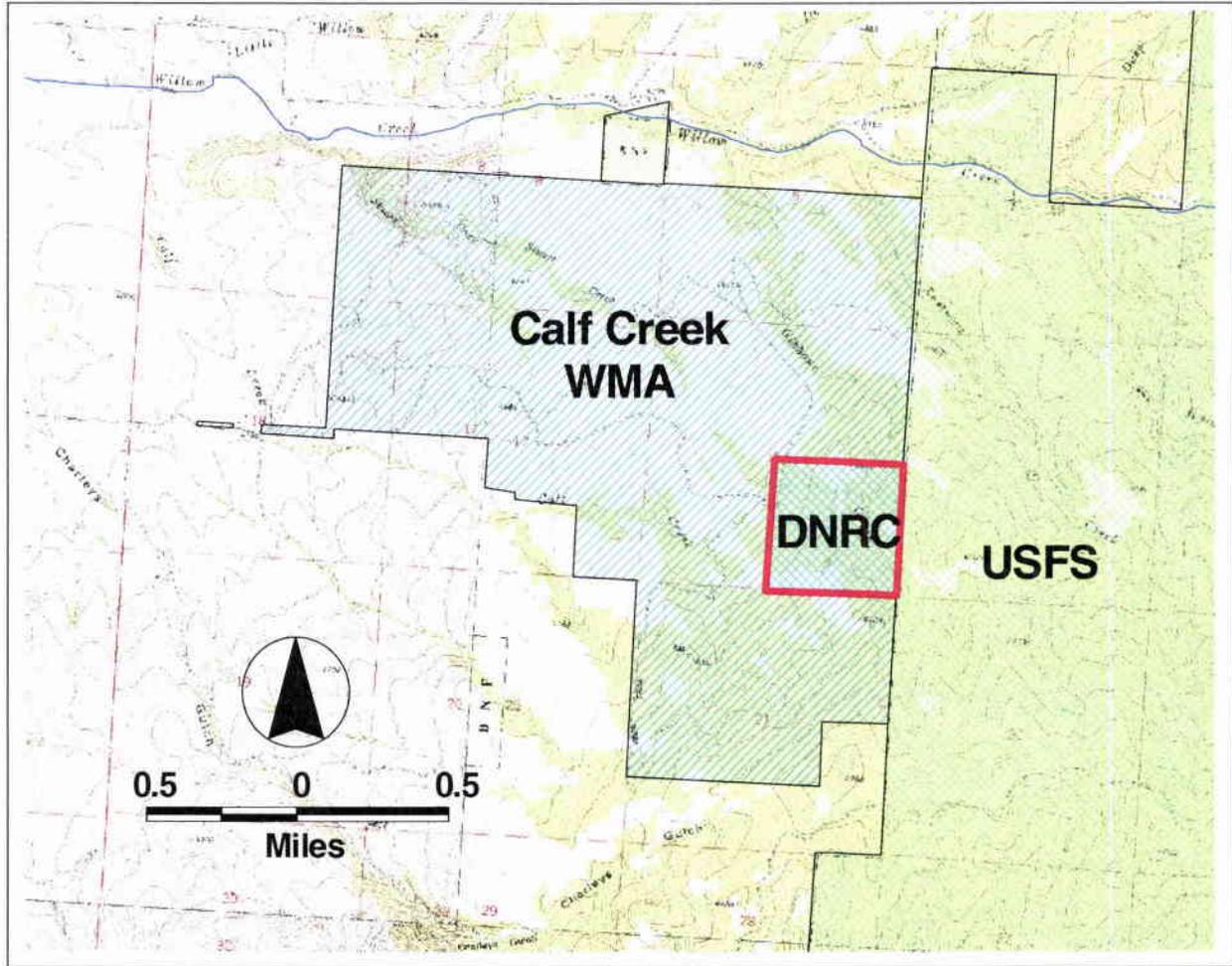


Figure 3. The Calf Creek WMA showing a 160-acre DNRC inholding and adjacent Forest Service land.

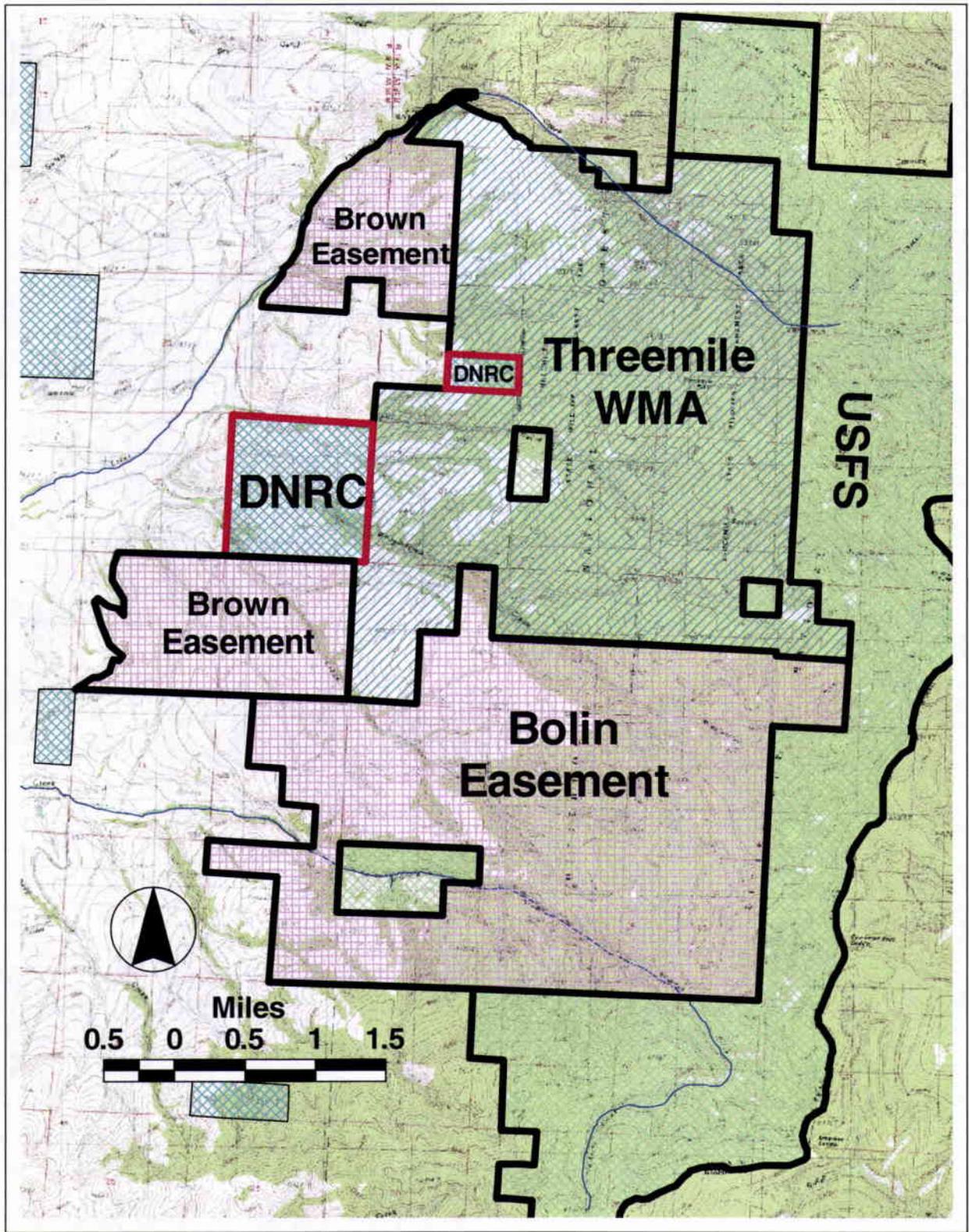


Figure 4. The Threemile WMA and surrounding FWP Conservation Easements and the DNRC lands considered for acquisition by trade from the DNRC.

housing densities increased. Serious impacts could occur with only one poorly located and managed homesite on the Lyman Creek property.

FWP's interest in acquiring DNRC inholdings on the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs is to protect habitat by blocking up ownership, simplify management, and enhance hunting and other wildlife-related recreation. This would guarantee that the land would be managed for wildlife in perpetuity. These properties are within or adjacent to FWP WMAs but managed by DNRC. FWP ownership will facilitate wildlife-oriented fencing, habitat enhancement, weed control, grazing, and access. Under FWP ownership these parcels would be protected from development and become part of the current rest-rotation grazing program on the Threemile WMA and any future habitat enhancement projects.

This proposed project would be a win-win for FWP, DNRC, and the public because it would block up and simplify management for both state agencies and provide the public with additional access in the French Basin area and additional lands managed specifically for wildlife on the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

FWP proposes to purchase the 367.92 acres for \$625,500.00 using Habitat Montana Funds and other financial assistance from RMEF. A second phase of the proposal is to exchange the property with DNRC for inholdings of equal value on the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs. RMEF acquired an option to purchase the Lyman Creek property when it came on the market and was able to move quickly to secure this important parcel of private land with the intention of transferring the property into public ownership. It is understood that RMEF is only holding the option for a short time until FWP can complete its public review and approval process.

If the DNRC-FWP exchange is also approved and completed, DNRC would assume management of the Lyman Creek property and FWP would assume management of the former DNRC land in the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs including the long-term costs of land management as part of its continuing management program for these WMAs.

FWP's purpose for purchasing the Lyman Creek property and exchanging it with DNRC is to protect important habitat for deer, elk and other wildlife by helping to put it into public ownership. This is a key property for wildlife and for public recreation because it is winter range surrounded by DNRC and Forest Service public land.

If the subsequent land exchange is approved transferring the Lyman Creek property to DNRC and the DNRC tracts to FWP, FWP would manage habitat on the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs to enhance forest and grassland forage for elk and deer. FWP would manage public access and recreation in keeping with traditional FWP practices in Hunting Districts 204 and 261. A draft management plan for these management areas is attached in Appendix A, which more thoroughly explains FWP's proposed management direction and strategies for the properties.

Benefits of the Proposed Action

The proposed land purchase and exchange would realize major benefits to wildlife and the public. It would protect the Lyman Creek wildlife habitat values through DNRC's public ownership and management. The proposed action would directly benefit 800-1,000 elk and several hundred mule and white-tailed deer that winter in French Basin, plus benefit the elk, deer and other wildlife that use the Lyman Creek property year round. There would also be the added public benefit of recreational access in an area where access has been an issue because of the Lyman Creek inholding that has proved a hindrance to people wanting to traverse from one area to another on this part of the Sula State Forest and Bitterroot National Forest.

The acquisition of land through a land exchange between DNRC and FWP at the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs would directly benefit about 500 elk and numerous mule and white-tailed deer that winter on these WMAs as well as elk, deer and other species that use the WMAs year round.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

FWP considered the alternative of taking no action regarding this purchase and exchange. The no-action alternative would risk the future development of the Lyman Creek property that could negatively impact elk and mule deer winter range. Moreover, as a private inholding surrounded by public land, it may continue to not be available to the public and may continue to block non-motorized travel. FWP and other public recommendations in proposed actions on the property would not be solicited to determine the occurrence, pace, timing and type of proposed development or use. FWP would retain the option to comment to the Ravalli County Commissioners on proposed land subdivisions under existing subdivision laws.

The fate of the DNRC lands considered for acquisition by FWP through exchange in this proposal is uncertain under the no action alternative. There is no guarantee that they will remain in public ownership or be managed primarily to benefit wildlife. Parcels like those within or adjacent to the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs would be very appealing to developers, in particular the section 36 adjacent to the Threemile WMA.

ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION AND NO ACTION

Threatened and Endangered Species

The gray wolf is listed as threatened in Montana, and is present on the subject lands. The Lyman Creek property was within the denning home range of the Sleeping Child pack of 16 members until that pack was destroyed because of conflicts with livestock. Three other wolf packs – the East Fork, Sula and Divide Creek packs – range to within 5 miles of the Lyman Creek property, and it is expected that wolves will repopulate the area in the future. The Calf Creek WMA is within the denning home range of the Skalkaho pack of 10+ wolves. The Threemile WMA is not within the home range of any documented wolf pack, however, tracks and reports of wolves in the area are common. The proposed action would be consistent with the goal of recovering wolf

populations in Montana because it would protect habitat for important prey species (i.e., elk and mule deer) and protect land from development.

Bald eagles are classified as threatened in Montana. There are active nests along the Bitterroot River and the East Fork of the Bitterroot River, but none are known to occur within ½-mile of the subject lands. The nearest known nest to any of the properties is the Sula nest about 5 miles south of the Lyman Creek property. The proposed action would have no impact on bald eagles.

Grizzly bears are classified as a threatened species in Montana. There are no known resident grizzly bears in Ravalli County; however, in 2002 there was a confirmed sighting in the Eightmile Creek drainage that is just a mile north of the Threemile WMA. The proposed action is consistent with the goal of recovering grizzly bear populations in Montana because it would protect lands from development and put a wildlife management emphasis on properties incorporated into the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs. No action would allow the possibility for increases in potential conflicts with humans if land subdivision or related developments occur.

Canada lynx are classified as a threatened species in Montana. Lynx are likely to occur on any of the properties being considered in this purchase and trade. Completion of the proposed project would benefit lynx by protecting habitat from development and managing land for the good of wildlife. No action could lead to habitat being usurped by development.

Sensitive Species

The properties considered in this proposal have suitable habitat or habitat potential for a number of sensitive species including fisher, wolverine, flammulated owl, great gray owl, black-backed woodpecker, pileated woodpecker, Lewis's woodpecker, northern goshawk, and olive-sided flycatcher. For all sensitive species, the proposed action would provide 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 important elk and deer winter on the Lyman Creek property vulnerable to future management decisions by private landowners, who might manage to achieve objectives that do not feature the general public interest in wildlife. Such changes could negatively affect elk and 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. The proposed action would be an overall benefit to elk and deer winter range in Ravalli County; the no action alternative could prove to be a detriment.

Predators and Scavengers

A diversity of wildlife species are associated with, and benefit from, the prey base provided by elk and deer. Humans are the primary predators on deer and elk populations. Mountain lion,

black bear, grizzly bear, gray wolf, coyote, and golden eagle currently prey upon these deer and elk, 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 during winter and spring. Antlers and bones are a mineral source 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.

The no-action alternative would leave the elk and deer winter range vulnerable to incompatible future management of the subject lands. A 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.

Wetlands/Floodplains

There is no designated floodplain affected by this proposal. Because of streamside management zones described in Montana law, both the proposed action and no-action would have similar neutral effects on the immediate streambanks 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 Ravalli 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 land, that could be farmed, is relatively flat (0-15 percent slopes) and currently non-forested.

Hunting

The Bitterroot Valley is one of the most popular elk hunting destinations in western Montana, and the three areas considered in this proposal--Lyman Creek and the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs--contribute significantly to that hunting. The Lyman Creek property in the East Fork of the Bitterroot is in the heart of a popular hunting area in hunting district 270. Estimates based on FWP Darby Game Check Station and statewide harvest survey data for that part of the hunting district suggest that an average of 1,200 hunters per year spend 7,800 hunter-days pursuing elk and harvest about 200, half bulls and half antlerless. A record harvest occurred in 2005 with hunters passing through the Darby Check Station checking 475 elk including 178 bulls and 297 antlerless from the East Fork of the Bitterroot. Deer hunting is also popular in the East Fork of the Bitterroot and about 900 hunters each year spend 5,400 days afield and harvest 140 mule deer and 129 whitetails.

There is no check station data that covers the area of the Calf Creek WMA in HD 261 or the Threemile WMA in HD 204. Estimates of hunting in these areas are based on the 1999-2003

statewide hunter harvest survey data and knowledge of elk distribution from annual elk census flights. These data suggest that in the general area including the Calf Creek WMA about 300 elk hunters spend nearly 2,000 days afield and harvest around 50 elk each year, about one third bulls and two thirds antlerless. In the same area about 225 deer hunters spend about 1,300 days and harvest around 10 mule deer and 70 whitetails annually.

Each year in the Threemile WMA area of HD 204 nearly 400 elk hunters hunt more than 2,400 days and harvest about 60 elk, one third being bulls. Also, an estimated 500 deer hunters spend over 2,800 days hunting and harvest about 25 mule deer and 125 whitetails.

The no-action alternative would risk a loss in elk and deer hunting opportunity. The proposed action would benefit hunting within the ranges of affected elk and deer populations by securing favorable, long-term management of important winter range and public access.

Forest management

Upon completion of the proposed action, the Lyman Creek property would be part of the Sula State Forest under DNRC management and objectives. Former DNRC tracts on the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs transferred to FWP through the proposed DNRC/FWP exchange would be managed by FWP under forest management guidelines outlined in the existing management plans for those WMAs. On property that it owns, FWP is committed to forest management to benefit wildlife. This may include silvicultural treatments to fine-tune habitat features and insure healthy forests to address the needs of diverse wildlife communities, in addition to providing critical winter range for deer and elk. Any future proposal for such treatment would be thoroughly described and analyzed in a MEPA environmental review process with public participation. Under the no-action alternative there would be no public input or control over forest management on the Lyman Creek property. Under the no action alternative the DNRC tracts proposed for exchange to FWP on the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs would remain in DNRC ownership and managed under DNRC rules.

Public access

Under the proposed action the Lyman Creek property would become part of the Sula State Forest and open to the public. This is a key property for public access. Not only would it provide land for hunting and other recreation, but would make foot and horse travel on the east side of French Basin much easier for people. Because of its lay on the landscape this property has been a difficult barrier for people to negotiate (see Fig. 2).

Current legal year round public access on DNRC lands traded to FWP and incorporated into the Threemile WMA would become more restricted because no access is allowed on the WMA from December 1 to May 15 to minimize disturbance to wintering elk and deer. However, current access to the general public during this time of year is extremely limited, because of surrounding private land.

The 160 acres considered in this proposal within the Calf Creek WMA 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.

Livestock grazing

The Lyman Creek property would eventually become part of the DNRC Sula State Forest and be incorporated into its grazing program.

Lands acquired by FWP from DNRC would be incorporated into any existing grazing programs on the Calf Creek or Threemile WMA. Livestock grazing on the WMAs is designed specifically to maintain or enhance forage production for wildlife and protect and enhance riparian areas. There is a three-pasture rest-rotation grazing program in place on about 250 acres of the Threemile WMA. If the proposed project is approved and completed, the delineation of pastures could be re-evaluated and may result in a change to the management plans. If there are any existing grazing leases to other individuals on the Three Mile DNRC tracts proposed for exchange, those leasehold interests must be addressed under DNRC rules. There is currently no livestock grazing on the Calf Creek WMA and FWP holds the grazing lease on the DNRC tract at this time.

No-action would leave the option open for a future lessee or landowner of the Lyman Creek property to graze livestock. One likely scenario for 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), and can result in damage to soil and vegetation.

Air and Water Quality

The proposed action would likely have no effect on air quality on the subject lands. Any effects on air quality would likely be in the form of burning either following logging or as habitat improvement, but it is uncertain if such possible activities would be more or less than under the no action alternative. If such projects were to be considered in the future by either state agency, they would go through their own MEPA analysis.

The potential for impacts to water quality exist along intermittent streams during spring runoff. Under the proposed action, the Lyman Creek property would become part of the Sula State Forest under DNRC management and DNRC inholdings on the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs would come under FWP ownership and management. 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 development on the subject lands in the future.

Historic and Cultural Resources

Both FWP and DNRC must provide the protections and considerations offered under the Montana Antiquities Act for historic and cultural resources on land each agency owns. 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 Lyman Creek property while it remains 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 little or no effect on the tax base of Ravalli County because FWP makes annual payments to the county in amounts equal to the property taxes that would be assessed to private citizens (MCA 87-1-603). DNRC does not pay property taxes. In this instance, the taxes on the Lyman Creek parcel were \$227.59 in 2005 and if DNRC eventually receives ownership of the Lyman Creek property through the proposed exchange, that property will no longer be assessed by Ravalli County. Conversely, if the exchange is finalized, FWP will pay property taxes on the properties it will receive from DNRC that were previously not taxable. FWP currently pays over \$8,000 annually to Ravalli County for land it owns.

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. Relatively minor future losses in habitat or habitat security on subject lands would contribute to a larger cumulative loss of winter habitat for elk, 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 conserve winter habitats for deer and elk.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

RMEF helped FWP identify issues and strategies in summer 2006 that ultimately led to development of this proposal. FWP has consulted with potentially affected agencies and neighbors including DNRC and the Bitterroot National Forest in the origination of this proposal.

Formal public participation specific to FWP's proposed purchase of 367.92 acres from RMEF and subsequent trade with DNRC 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 October 16 through November 15, 2006. A public hearing will be held at the Daly-Leach Chapel at 1010 West Main in Hamilton on October 30, 2006 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 December 2006, based upon a thorough review of public comment.

Comments should be addressed to John Vore; Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; P.O. Box 1408, Hamilton, MT 59840 (phone 406-375-2273; email jvore@mt.gov). Comments must be received no later than November 15, 2006 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.

Please note again that if the acquisition of the Lyman Creek property is approved, a separate Environmental Assessment will be completed to solicit additional public comment on the DNRC/FWP land exchange proposal as required under DNRC exchange procedures.

Appendix A.

Proposed Lyman Creek Project DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to purchase a 367.92-acre inholding near Lyman Creek on the Sula State Forest from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) for the appraised value of \$625,500.00 and trade it to the DNRC for inholdings on the Calf Creek and Threemile Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). The RMEF initially bought the Lyman Creek property because when it came on the market they were able to move quickly to secure this important parcel of private land and hold it until FWP could arrange for its purchase and trade to DNRC. It is understood that RMEF, and in turn FWP, are only holding it for a short time. All the mentioned properties are in Ravalli County.

This plan focuses on FWP's long-term management direction for the inholdings on the Calf Creek and Threemile WMAs. FWP's acquisition of these inholdings is the end result of this proposed transaction, and FWP's investment from the Habitat Montana Program will ultimately rest with these inholdings, as will FWP's future management responsibilities.

FWP's proposed purchase of the Lyman Creek property will enable DNRC to block-up public access in this highly valued hunting area, upon exchanging the WMA inholdings to FWP. FWP will hold the Lyman Creek property only for as long as it takes to complete its exchange to DNRC, which is expected to consume only a few months. While in temporary ownership, FWP will undertake no direct management activities on the Lyman Creek property (e.g., timber management, weed management, fencing, road stabilization), but will focus its time and efforts instead on completing the land exchange with DNRC. In the unlikely event that FWP foresees owning the Lyman Creek property into the growing season of 2007, FWP will reopen this management plan to consider a maintenance level of weed management and other short-term management needs.

AREA DESCRIPTION

DNRC Inholding in Calf Creek WMA – The DNRC owns a 160-acre inholding in the east part of the Calf Creek WMA bordered on the north, west and south by the WMA and on the east by Forest Service. Elevation of this quarter section of land ranges from 5,200 to 5,920 feet, and aspects vary because of a ridge that runs south to north through its middle. Roughly the western half is a west aspect while in the eastern half is a small, north-flowing creek with adjacent aspects being both east and west. Habitat types on the western half are a mix of open grasslands and scattered mostly second growth Douglas-fir and occasional ponderosa pine. On the east half habitat types are similar but with relatively less open grassland, more and denser conifer canopy cover, and some spruce/fir along the creek.

The Calf Creek WMA and surrounding area is an important elk and deer winter range. It is within the Willow Creek to Skalkaho Creek elk survey area where from 529 to 758 elk have been counted during spring census flights over the last 5 years, including up to 227 associated with the Calf Creek WMA. Mule and white-tailed deer also winter on Calf Creek but in lesser numbers, about 50 of each species. Just 5 miles south of the Calf Creek WMA is a major mule deer winter range that typically harbors 500-800 mule deer. The WMA is year round habitat for elk and deer as well as other big game including moose, black bear, and mountain lion. There are no known grizzly bears in the area but gray wolves are common. The WMA is within the home range of the Skalkaho Pack of 10+ animals that have denned about 4 miles south of the WMA. Coyote, red fox, and bobcat are common and it would not be unusual for an occasional wolverine, lynx and badger to be found there. Smaller forest carnivores include fisher, marten and weasel. Upland game birds include blue, ruffed and spruce grouse, turkey, and an occasional pheasant and gray partridge. Other birds of note are great gray owl, pileated woodpecker and northern goshawk.

DNRC Inholdings in Threemile WMA –Two DNRC parcels associated with the Threemile WMA are being considered in this proposal: an 80-acre inholding along the western edge of the WMA and a 640-acre section that abuts the WMAs western boundary. Elevation of the 80-acre piece ranges from 4,400 to 4,610 feet on a western aspect. The forest-grassland ecotone bisects this parcel with roughly its western half in open grassland and the eastern being scattered mostly second growth Douglas-fir and occasional ponderosa pine.

The 640-acre section is mostly an open, gently sloping, westerly aspect grassland ranging in elevation from 3,830 to 4,390 feet. Spring Gulch runs along the northern boundary, Wheelbarrow Creek flows east to west through the middle of the section and Grayhorse Creek flows through the southwest corner. Two major ridge complexes favored by deer and elk as winter foraging areas traverse this parcel, one between Spring Gulch and Wheelbarrow Creek and the other between Wheelbarrow and Grayhorse Creeks.

The importance of the Threemile area as winter range for elk and deer has long been recognized by FWP. The WMA is the nucleus of a complex of FWP investments in habitat including its purchase of two adjoining Conservation Easements – the 1,904-acre Brown easement in 1995 and the 5,355-acre Bolin Easement in 1997. The area provides important winter habitat for about 150-250 elk and a lesser number of mule and white-tailed deer. Some elk and deer can be found here year-round along with moose, black bear and mountain lion. There are no known grizzly bears in the area but gray wolves have been reported. Coyote, red fox, and bobcat are common and it would not be unusual for an occasional wolverine, lynx and badger to be found there. Smaller forest carnivores include fisher, marten and weasel. Upland game birds include blue, ruffed and spruce grouse, turkey, and an occasional pheasant and gray partridge. Other birds of note are great gray owl, pileated woodpecker and northern goshawk.

CALF CREEK WMA MANAGEMENT PLAN

FWP's management direction for the inholding at Calf Creek WMA would be folded into the existing management plan for Calf Creek WMA, which was implemented in 1998 with

extensive local public involvement as provided under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). The entirety of the MEPA process is preserved in files at FWP Region 2 headquarters in Missoula, and the tenets of the approved plan are summarized in a brochure also available from FWP, Region 2. Goals and objectives for the management of Calf Creek WMA are:

Goal: FWP strives to maintain and enhance native plant communities on Calf Creek WMA as habitat for a diversity of wildlife species, emphasizing elk winter range. Secondly, FWP strives to provide hunting and other outdoor recreational opportunities, while avoiding conflicts with the overriding purpose of providing elk winter habitat.

Objectives:

- Maintain and enhance native sagebrush-grasslands and forests, and prescribe management that mimics natural processes and enhances ecologic integrity and function.
- Maintain and enhance streambank stability and ecologic diversity (horizontal and vertical) of native plant communities and associated animal life in riparian zones.
- Prevent soil erosion and enhance elk forage quantity and quality in non-native grasslands.
- Provide space, cover and natural forage to support 200 elk through winter and early spring.
- Recognize habitat values on neighboring private lands and impacts of WMA management on neighboring landowners. Develop and enhance cooperating working relations with neighbors.
- Encourage and coordinate hands-on community involvement in education programs, property maintenance, habitat management, and research.
- Develop regulations that enhance recreational opportunities for which Calf Creek WMA is uniquely suited and recognized: hiking, horseback riding, and walk-in hunting for elk and deer.

THREEMILE WMA MANAGEMENT PLAN

Similarly, FWP's management direction for the inholdings at Threemile WMA would be folded into the existing management plan for Threemile WMA, which was implemented in 1992 with extensive local public involvement as provided under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). The entirety of the MEPA process is preserved in files at FWP Region 2 headquarters in Missoula, as well as the final plan. Goals and objectives for the management of Threemile WMA are:

Goal: Restore and sustain the natural productivity of the ponderosa pine/bunchgrass/riparian ecotone extending from Threemile Creek to Ambrose Creek, including Threemile WMA and adjacent ownerships, to retain a wide variety of potential management alternatives for future generations. ...provide high-quality winter range for elk and mule deer, as well as compatible public recreational opportunities.

Objectives:

- Reduce soil erosion and stream siltation.

- Enhance natural soil development processes.
- Control noxious weeds in all nonforested areas and along open roads, and prevent infestations in weed-free areas.
- Maintain and enhance native plant communities, emphasizing bunchgrass, ponderosa pine, and riparian communities.
- Create a partnership for elk management and land stewardship with affected, adjacent private landowners.
- Increase the Threemile WMA elk herd from 130 to 250, and assess the larger herd's relationship to the economic and environmental carrying capacities of the winter range.
- Inventory the WMA mule deer herd and maintain its numbers commensurate with future assessments of winter range carrying capacity.
- Conduct a baseline inventory of all wildlife species on Threemile WMA and develop habitat restoration programs as appropriate to provide for the needs of declining endemic species.
- Manage public access to provide a diversity of wildlife-related recreational opportunities and prevent serious conflicts with other objectives.
- Increase public awareness and appreciation of the Threemile WMA.

NOXIOUS-WEED MANAGEMENT

The spread of existing noxious weed species and the introduction and establishment of new exotic species are among the greatest risks to native plant communities and wildlife habitat across Montana. Accordingly, both the Calf Creek and Threemile WMA management plans emphasize weed management strategies, and implementation of these strategies has occurred as planned across both WMAs.

The Calf Creek parcel is significantly forested, providing limited opportunity for noxious weed establishment and spread. Potential future forest management activities would be conducted in a manner that minimizes roads, skidtrails, and other disturbances of the soil surface, and would be followed with inspections and herbicide treatments of log landings, roads, and other disturbed areas as needed. Grassland portions of the Calf Creek parcel would be folded into the existing program of biological and periodic chemical controls for spotted knapweed. Informed recreationists—typically horseback riders in the summer—report new weed occurrences and FWP responds with eradication or control measures as the situation dictates.

The Threemile parcels are relatively arid, with erosive, granitic soils and grassland-dominated vegetation types. These sites are prone to invasion by spotted knapweed and Dalmatian toadflax, and would require active weed management. The need for active weed management is accentuated by the proximity of these parcels to private property. FWP would fold these parcels into the continuing and successful chemical weed-control program at Threemile WMA, using a helicopter to apply selective herbicides at the minimum necessary rate

and frequency. Biological controls, such as *Cyphocleonus*, would be supplemented to improve the effectiveness and reduce the frequency of chemical applications.

PUBLIC ACCESS MANAGEMENT

All parcels would be folded into the existing travel management plans for the respective WMAs. In all cases, public access would be restricted from December 1 through May 14 annually. In all cases, public access by non-motorized means would be allowed from May 15 through November 30 annually. None of the subject parcels are directly accessible via open roads. The Calf Creek parcel requires a hike or horseback/mountain-bicycle ride of 2 miles to access it. Open roads pass within ¼-mile and 1 mile of the subject parcels on Threemile WMA.

GRAZING PLAN

A livestock grazing alternative was reviewed in the draft Calf Creek WMA management plan, but was not selected in the final decision. Therefore, FWP would not plan to graze livestock on the Calf Creek parcel. FWP is the current lessee of this parcel under DNRC ownership.

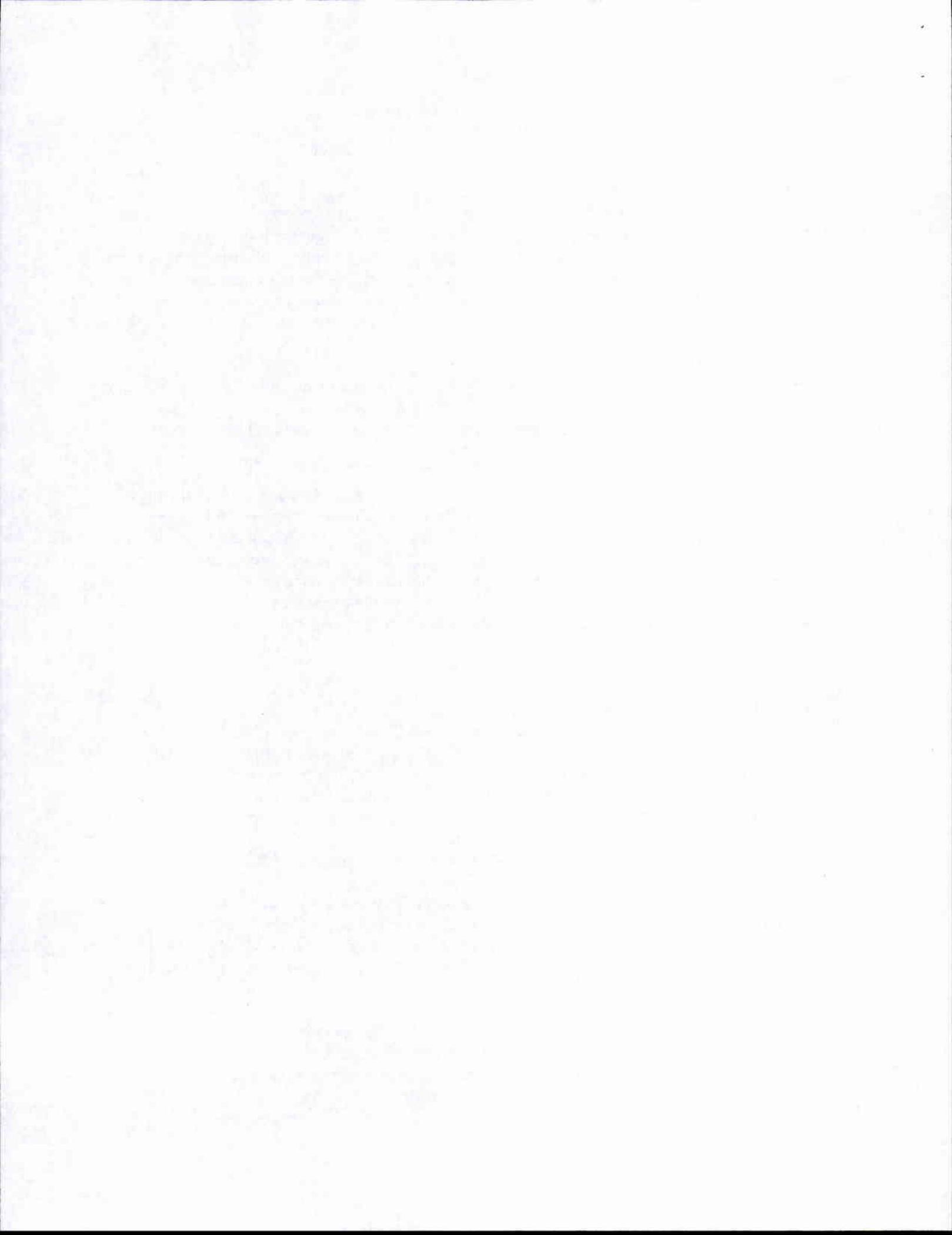
Livestock grazing to manage vegetation quality for wildlife is an option available to FWP under the current management plan for Threemile WMA. Presently, private landowners lease the subject parcels for cattle grazing under DNRC ownership. FWP would attempt to work with both landowners to continue livestock grazing on these parcels under a prescription that employs rest-rotation principles on appropriate portions of the pertinent private lands, as well as the newly acquired FWP parcels. Each customized grazing plan would blend ranch objectives with the wildlife habitat purposes of the WMA. Failing agreement between the private landowners and FWP on grazing management practices for the subject parcels, FWP would suspend livestock grazing on these parcels.

FOREST MANAGEMENT

Both the existing Calf Creek and Threemile WMA management plans purposely stop short of prescribing forest management, choosing instead to address forest management in separate planning and review processes as needs arise. The Calf Creek parcel is in greatest need of forest management, due to apparent evidence of insect damage to mature trees. FWP's plan for the near-term would be to inventory forest stands on the Calf Creek parcel to identify risks to forest sustainability, and opportunities for habitat enhancement. Any proposal for timber harvest would be proposed and reviewed under MEPA in a separate process.

FWP is currently evaluating the need and opportunities for forested habitat enhancement at Threemile WMA. Should a proposal be drafted, it will be carried forward to the public for input and review in a separate process. The subject parcels at Threemile WMA, particularly the 80-acre parcel, would be evaluated as part of this separate forest management review at that time.

In all cases, FWP's forest management would be focused toward recruiting old trees on forested habitat types, protecting stands of old trees from stand replacing fires in appropriate habitat types, removing trees that have replaced natural grasslands in the absence of fire, and recruiting snags and aspen to enhance wildlife diversity.



Appendix B.

LYMAN CREEK
FEE TITLE ACQUISITION
SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

Prepared by:
Rob Brooks
October, 2006

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 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 acquisition of the Lyman property to FWP from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. This report addresses the physical and institutional setting as well as the social and economic impacts associated with the proposed fee title acquisition. This evaluation does not address any potential impacts from the proposed land exchange between the Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC) and MFWP. Those impacts will be evaluated under DNRC exchange criteria to be published in a later Environmental Assessment. At this time the exact legal descriptions of the DNRC tracts are pending appraised values and final identification in order to equally balance the exchange tracts between the agencies.

II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

A. Property Description

The 367.92-acre Lyman property is located in Ravalli County on the east side of French Basin and is surrounded by State Forest and Forest Service land. A detailed description of this property is included in the environmental assessment (EA).

B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations

This 368-acre parcel is mainly lodgepole pine type with scattered Douglas-fir. The property and the adjacent lands are important elk wintering range and support large numbers of whitetail and mule deer. Moose, black bear and mountain lions utilize the property year round.

C. Current Use

The Lyman property was burned during the forest fires of 2000 and currently supports early seral forest and grass. No commercial uses occur on the property at this time.

D. Management Alternatives

- 1) Purchase the property fee title.
- 2) No purchase

MFWP Fee Title Purchase

The intent of the Lyman land purchase is to protect and enhance the intermountain grassland habitat, enhance the overall integrity of the state DNRC and Forest Service lands surrounding the property.

No Purchase Alternative

The no purchase alternative requires some assumptions since use and management of the property will vary depending on what future owners decide to do with the property. There is potential for subdivision of this land that would impact the habitat and access opportunities for the public.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Section II identified the management alternatives this report addresses. The fee title purchase will provide long-term protection of important wildlife habitat and consistent management of this land. 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 agencies including school districts.

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

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will pay \$625,500.00 for the 367.92-acre parcel to acquire fee title with funding provided from Habitat Montana dollars.

The financial impacts to local governments are the potential changes in tax revenues resulting from the fee title purchase. The sale of this land and subsequent title transfer to MFWP will not change the tax revenues that Ravalli County currently collects on this 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." Current taxes on this land are approximately \$227.00.

B. Economic Impacts

There will not be any significant financial impacts to local businesses associated with the fee title purchase of this land and subsequent ownership by Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The fee title purchase and title transfer to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will provide long term protection for wildlife habitat, maintain the open space integrity of the land, enhance public recreation opportunities in the French Basin.

The fee title purchase and title transfer to MFWP will not cause a reduction in tax revenues on this property from their current levels to Ravalli County under Montana Code 87-1-603. Overall financial impacts to local business will be minimal. Recreational opportunities will be enhanced which may result in small yet positive impacts for local businesses that provide services to recreationists.