



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405
406-454-5840
FAX: 406-761-8477
31 July 2009

To Whom It May Concern:

The Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Department (MFWP) proposes to acquire an 80-acre parcel of land known as the Glass Property. This Property lies immediately adjacent to the Beckman Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The Beckman WMA was established as a result of land acquired and then gifted to MFWP by the Leroy B. Beckman Estate in accordance with Mr. Beckman's Last Will and Testament. The WMA and the Glass Property are located approximately 12 miles ENE of Denton in Fergus County.

Consistent with terms outlined by Mr. Beckman in establishing this wildlife management area, the land is to be managed by MFWP for "WINTER-SUMMER range lands PRIMARILY FOR DEER", and as a "Public Hunting Ground". MFWP proposes to add the 80-acre Glass Property to the existing Beckman WMA under terms consistent with the WMA's purpose.

Enclosed is the draft Glass Property Environmental Assessment and preliminary Management Plan for your review. Public comment is welcome and will be received through August 31, 2009. If you have questions, need additional copies of the draft EA or choose to provide written comments, please contact us at the following address:

Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
% Beckman WMA / Glass EA
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

Electronic comment may also be received at: fwprg42@mt.gov

Thank you for your interest,

Graham Taylor
Regional Wildlife Manager
Great Falls, Montana

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Wildlife Bureau

Draft Environmental Assessment

BECKMAN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA
PROPOSED ACQUISITION

Incorporating:
Glass Property



I. INTRODUCTION

Mr. LeRoy Byron Beckman's Last Will and Testament established the RBB Deer Lands Trust Fund to acquire lands for deer and public hunting. Mr. Beckman's Will instructed Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) to assist in locating these lands, and that the lands should be within Fergus, Judith Basin, Cascade, or Meagher Counties; mountain or valley lands; that are partly timbered; that has a stream running through it; and that the lands be comparable in cost to other lands in the area. Mr. Beckman further instructed that after the land was acquired the title and management be transferred to MFWP.

Within the 4 identified counties, MFWP personnel originally completed a thorough examination of numerous properties that were known to be for sale and that might meet Mr. Beckman's conditions. Of them, the Steiners' Trail's End Ranch, the Fertterer Property, the Green Property and the Barber Ranch were the best matches. Those properties, acquired over the last 8 years, now constitute the Beckman Wildlife Management Area. They were accepted by the Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks Commission as gifts and added to the State's system of Wildlife Management Areas.

Additional property lying adjacent to the Beckman WMA became available as offered by Ken Glass in 2008. These 80 acres complement the original intent and purpose of the Beckman Will by providing additional deer habitat in a manner similar to the existing WMA. It features a riparian and ponderosa pine/Douglas fir-juniper community and functionally complements the original acquisitions.

Since the Glass Property includes these community types, as well as meets the terms of Mr. Beckman's Last Will and Testament, and further builds upon the ability to produce and harvest deer, the MFWP Region 4 Supervisor recommends that the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission approve acquisition of these 80 acres in fee title and that the property be added to the Beckman Wildlife Management Area (WMA).

II. AUTHORITY AND DIRECTION

MFWP is authorized by statute (87-1-201) to protect, enhance and regulate the use of Montana's fish and wildlife resources for public benefit now and in the future. In 1987, the Montana Legislature passed HB526 that authorizes and regulates wildlife habitat leases, conservation easements, and/or fee title acquisition (87-1-241 and 242). The Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission and the State Land Board must approve any acquisition of land proposed by the agency. This Environmental Assessment is part of the decision making process.

III. LOCATION OF PROJECT and PHYSIOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The proposed Property is 80 acres located in the Judith River breaks, Fergus County, 12 miles northeast of Denton, Montana (see map Appendix I). It adjoins the existing Beckman Wildlife Management Area to the east, sharing one half mile of common boundary. It consists of steep-sided coulees with ridges that drain directly into the Judith River directly.

Elevations range from 3100 to 3300 feet. Soils are generally deep well drained clay loams. Annual precipitation ranges from 12 to 16 inches. The mean temperature is 44 degrees Fahrenheit. The average frost-free period is 120 to 130 days.

Legal description of the proposed Project property:

County: Fergus

W 1/2 of the SE ¼ of Section 22, T19N, and R16E.

Total Deeded = 80 acres

The accompanying map (Appendix I) displays the lands affected by the proposal. The project's exterior boundary borders the existing WMA. Three different private landowners border the Glass Property. Access to the Property exists by virtue of the adjoining common boundary with the Beckman WMA.

IV. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROJECT

The proposed Property is upland river breaks habitat, consisting of two major vegetative types: a ponderosa pine / Douglas fir-juniper community and a riparian bottom which occurs adjacent to the Judith River. Commercial timber does not exist on the property.

Because the Property has alternately steep and gentle terrain with several aspects, these exposures produce a diversity of plant species that offer quality deer forage through all seasons in most years. Consequently, the Property additionally contributes to the support of year-round habitat for as many as 200 mule deer and 50 white-tailed deer on and adjacent to the existing WMA. Ring-necked pheasants, Merriam's Turkey, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, beaver, fox, badger, and skunk use the property, as do a diverse group of small mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles. A list of wildlife species potentially using this area is contained in Appendix II.

In the immediate area around Denton, Montana, there is little public land available to the public for recreation. Excluding the occasional tract of Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation land that is located on a public road, the closest legally accessible public land for deer hunting is at least 20 miles away. Public lands available for

upland bird hunting or other recreational activities are also very scarce. The Glass Property augments existing public hunting and access opportunities on the adjacent WMA. Acquiring this Property would continue to build upon improved recreational opportunities in central Montana.

Since the Property contains riparian and ponderosa pine / Douglas fir-juniper types relative to the Habitat Montana classification of important and/or threatened habitats in Montana, and since the property is very good "WINTER-SUMMER range lands PRIMARILY FOR DEER", the property is most worthy of Mr. Beckman's vision that the land be "used for Wildlife Conservation purposes and as a Public Hunting Ground", and that it "shall be held in PERPETUITY".

V. SCOPE FOR THE PROJECT

Conserve and enhance land, water, and wildlife:

(1) The Property consists of 80 acres. It will be managed in perpetuity to enhance soils, water, vegetation, and wildlife species' habitats for the benefit of the general public as part of the larger Beckman WMA.

(2) The current condition of the habitat is fair to good. Areas near water sources have been utilized heavily by livestock and are in fair to good condition. Vegetation condition is better in more remote, steep areas and farther from water.

(3) Wildlife species of major interest are: mule deer, white-tailed deer, Ring-necked pheasant and Merriam's turkey. Species that are seasonally on the property and/or are not as abundant are mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, fox, badger, skunk and a variety of non-game birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

(4) Population objectives, as incorporated into the larger and contiguous WMA for the major wildlife species are: 200 mule deer and 50 white-tailed deer during fall, before hunting season. Current populations are estimated to be about 80% of objective for both species. Other wildlife species that are adapted to more residual and woody vegetative cover, as well as to agricultural crops such as alfalfa, will likely increase.

Contribute to hunting opportunity:

(1) The Property is accessible to the general public via foot travel from adjacent private lands with landowner permission and via the adjoining Beckman WMA. Additional foot access may be pursued through enrollment of neighboring properties into MFWP's Block Management Program.

(2) The harvest objective for mule deer and for white-tailed deer will be driven by the larger WMA and hunting district and their objectives. These species' populations, and their harvest, will be surveyed and monitored annually. Harvest objectives may be changed accordingly.

Over time, as game populations respond to increased forage quantity and quality, hunting recreation should improve likewise. Big game hunter numbers will likely stabilize at some social threshold while upland bird hunter numbers will fluctuate over time as bird numbers vary according to habitat and climactic conditions. Hunting recreation for deer and upland birds alone is anticipated to reach 400 hunter days per year on the WMA.

Contribute to non-hunting recreation:

(1) Hiking, river floating, picnicking, camping, bird watching, wildlife observing, horseback riding, and antler and flower picking will be available to the general public from April 1 through January 1.

(2) The number of non-hunting recreation days provided is anticipated to be 250 days annually on the entire WMA.

Protect open space and scenic areas:

These vegetation and topographic features provide diverse and unique examples of native habitats threatened by recreational homesite development. The breaks and riparian vegetative types are excellent wildlife habitat that is attractive to citizens who want to own a private hunting ranch, or to outfitters wishing to increase their client base or client success/satisfaction. Such interests have been expressed or intended. This land will remain accessible to the general recreating public at no additional cost.

Maintain local tax base, while demonstrating productive wildlife habitat is compatible with agriculture and other land uses:

(1) Since the historic land use has been limited to livestock operations, the change in tax dollars remitted to Fergus County when the property becomes a Wildlife Management Area, if different, will be minor. An annual "in lieu of taxes" payment will be made by MFWP to Fergus County in a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment of the property were it taxable to a private citizen (MCA 87-1-603).

(2) The primary goal for the property will be to improve the condition and productivity of all vegetative plant communities reflected on the larger WMA. This will increase the carrying capacity for deer and livestock. Since cattle grazing will be used as a tool to enhance the vegetation for wildlife, an actual reduction in the number of cattle grazed in the County may not be consequential. No tillable acres exists on the Glass Property.

Other Management Implications:

(1) The subject property has been managed as part of a remote, summer livestock grazing pasture. At present, only random, trespass livestock grazing occurs on the property owing to its size and juxtaposition to other properties. Future grazing schemes will be simplified, as the Glass Property is included in pasture layout and management.

(2) Several species of noxious weeds are found on the subject property. MFWP will endeavor to stop their spread and reduce their occurrence. Biological, chemical, and mechanical treatments will be used.

(3) No additional increase in MFWP manpower needs is expected relative to the Glass acquisition and management of the property. Management practices will dovetail with the existing Beckman WMA. The Department will make physical improvements only as time and manpower allow. MFWP often contracts with private local businesses for materials and labor when fencing or other on-ground improvements are necessary.

VI. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT CHECKLIST

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

ITEM:	MAJOR	MOD.	MINOR	NONE	UNK.	COMMENTS ATTACHED
TERRESTRIAL & AQUATIC LIFE & HABITATS		X				X
WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY, & DISTRIBUTION		X				X
GEOLOGY & SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY, & MOISTURE		X				X
VEGETATION COVER, QUALITY, & QUANTITY		X				X
AESTHETICS				X		
AIR QUALITY				X		
DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL				X		
RESOURCES OF LAND WATER, AIR, & ENERGY				X		

VII. EXPLANATION OF IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

TERRESTRIAL AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS

Positive impacts to mule deer, white-tailed deer, upland game birds, native species' habitats, and aquatic habitats will occur as a result of management emphasis directed to improve vegetation communities for the benefit of both species of deer and upland game birds.

WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY, AND DISTRIBUTION

Water quality and quantity will improve with controlled livestock grazing that leaves more residual cover in the uplands and riparian areas. Site-specific water impoundments may receive additional fenced protection from livestock use.

GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY, AND MOISTURE

Positive impacts to soil conditions will occur due to reduced livestock trampling in riparian areas and increased forage remaining following grazing treatments. Increased amounts of residual vegetation over the entire area will improve soil fertility, quality, stability, and moisture retention.

VEGETATION COVER, QUALITY, AND QUANTITY

Positive impacts to mule deer, white-tailed deer, upland game birds, native species' habitats, and aquatic habitats will occur as a result of management emphasis directed to improve vegetation communities for the benefit of both species of deer and upland game birds. Because deer select/consume more browse and forbs than cattle, increased carrying capacity for deer as a consequence of changed livestock grazing will not nullify the improved vegetative condition.

AESTHETICS

Improvement of the visual quality of the area will occur as a result of improved vegetative composition, quantity, and quality.

VIII. HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL CHECKLIST

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

ITEM:	MAJOR	MOD.	MINOR	NONE	UNK.	COMMENTS ATTACHED
SOCIAL STRUCTURES & MORES				X		
CULTURAL UNIQUENESS & DIVERSITY				X		
LOCAL & STATE TAX BASE & TAX REVENUE			X			X
AGRICULTURAL OR INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION				X		
HUMAN HEALTH				X		
ACCESS TO & QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL & WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES		X				X
QUANTITY & DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT				X		
DISTRIBUTION & DENSITY OF POPULATION & HOUSING				X		
DEMANDS FOR ENERGY				X		
LOCALLY ADAPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS/GOALS				X		
TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS & TRAFFIC FLOWS			X			X

IX. EXPLANATION OF IMPACTS TO THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUE

MFWP will make annual tax payments to Fergus County in a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment of the property were it taxable to a private citizen (MCA 87-1-603). A slight reduction in the number of cattle grazed in the county may occur, though current livestock grazing practices on the Property are random and not part of any managed grazing system. Having the Property open to public recreation will cumulatively increase income to local merchants and businesses.

ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES

Improved recreational opportunities will occur as a result of public ownership of the Property. Compared to past recreational opportunities, the impact will be improved public opportunity.

TRANSPORTATION NETWORK AND TRAFFIC FLOWS

During the fall hunting season there will a minor increase in human traffic to the property. During the winter there will be no traffic to the property. During the spring/summer period foot traffic will probably be unchanged compared to past uses. All in all the impact will be minor.

X. DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION OF REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES

1. No Action Alternative:

The “No Action” alternative would not preserve or enhance the diversity of wildlife habitats on the property for perpetuity. The “No Action” alternative would not preserve or enhance the general public’s recreational opportunities in perpetuity. This alternative would not honor Mr. Beckman’s Last Will and Testament.

2. Fee Title Acquisition Alternative: (Preferred Alternative)

The “Preferred” alternative would grant transfer of Fee Title and the property would be incorporated into the existing Beckman Wildlife Management Area. It would be managed primarily for deer and deer hunting. This alternative also meets important habitat objectives of MFWP.

XI. EVALUATION OF NEED FOR AN EIS

Based on the environmental assessment (EA), there will not be any significant negative impacts from the proposed action. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required and an EA is the appropriate level of review. The overall impact from the successful completion of the proposed action would provide substantial long-term benefits to both the physical and human environment.

XII. SCHEDULED PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND COMMENT

A public comment period will begin August 1, 2009 and end August 31, 2009. Duration of the comment period for the Draft Environmental Assessment is 31 days. A public hearing is not scheduled. The draft EA will be available on the FWP web site and at Region Four

FWP headquarters. Announcements of the draft EA will be mailed to news media, adjoining landowners, and conservation and other interest groups/agencies. Written comment should be delivered to the following address:

Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks
Wildlife Division
% Beckman WMA / Glass EA
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

Or electronically to:

E-mail: fwprg42@mt.gov (Include Beckman WMA / Glass EA in subject heading.)

XIII. EA PREPARATION

Persons Responsible for EA preparation:

Tom Stivers
Wildlife Biologist, MFWP
Lewistown Area Resource Office
P.O. Box 938
Lewistown, MT 59457

Graham Taylor, MFWP
Regional Wildlife Manager
4600 Giant Springs Road
Great Falls, MT 59405

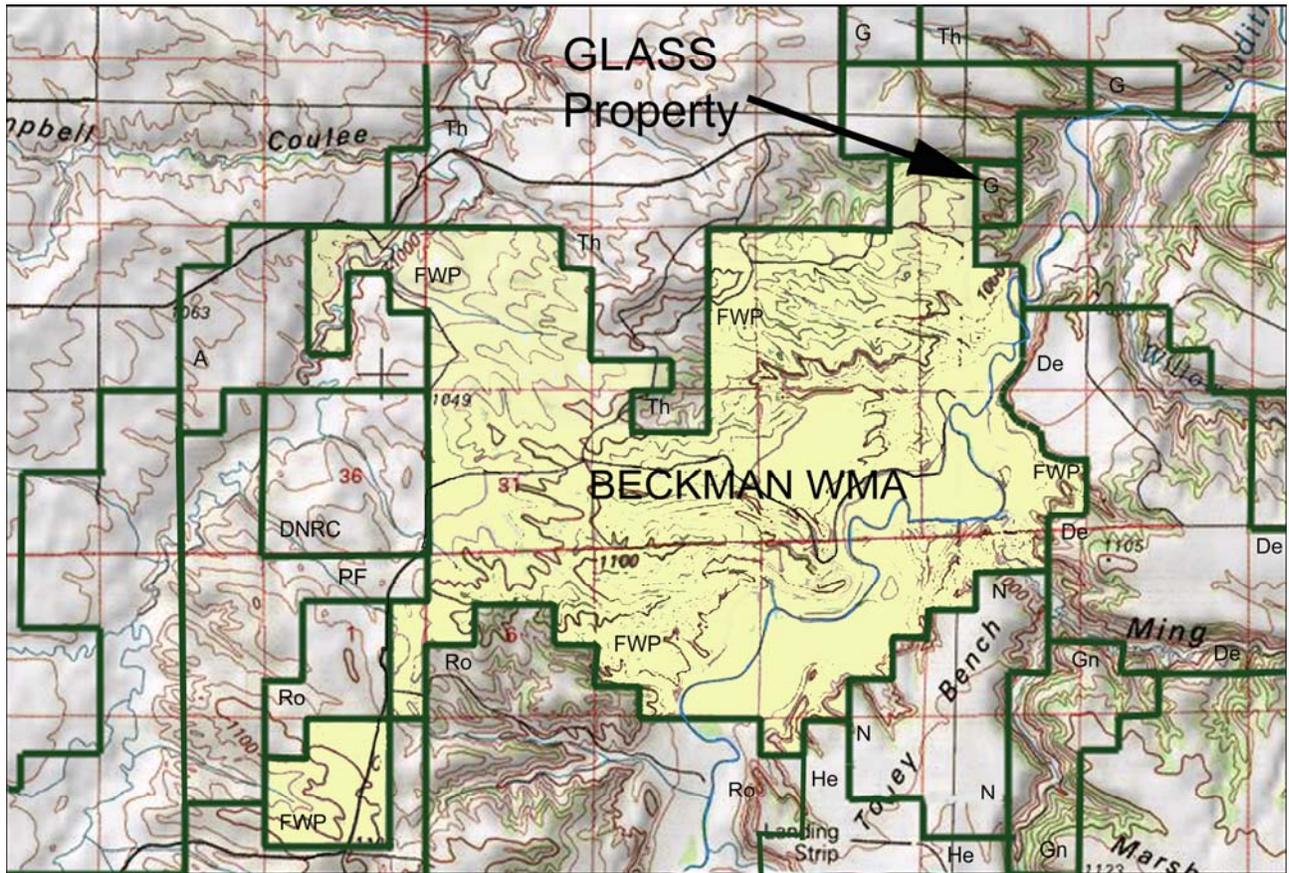
XIV. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Fisheries Bureau
Wildlife Bureau
Lands Unit
Legal Bureau

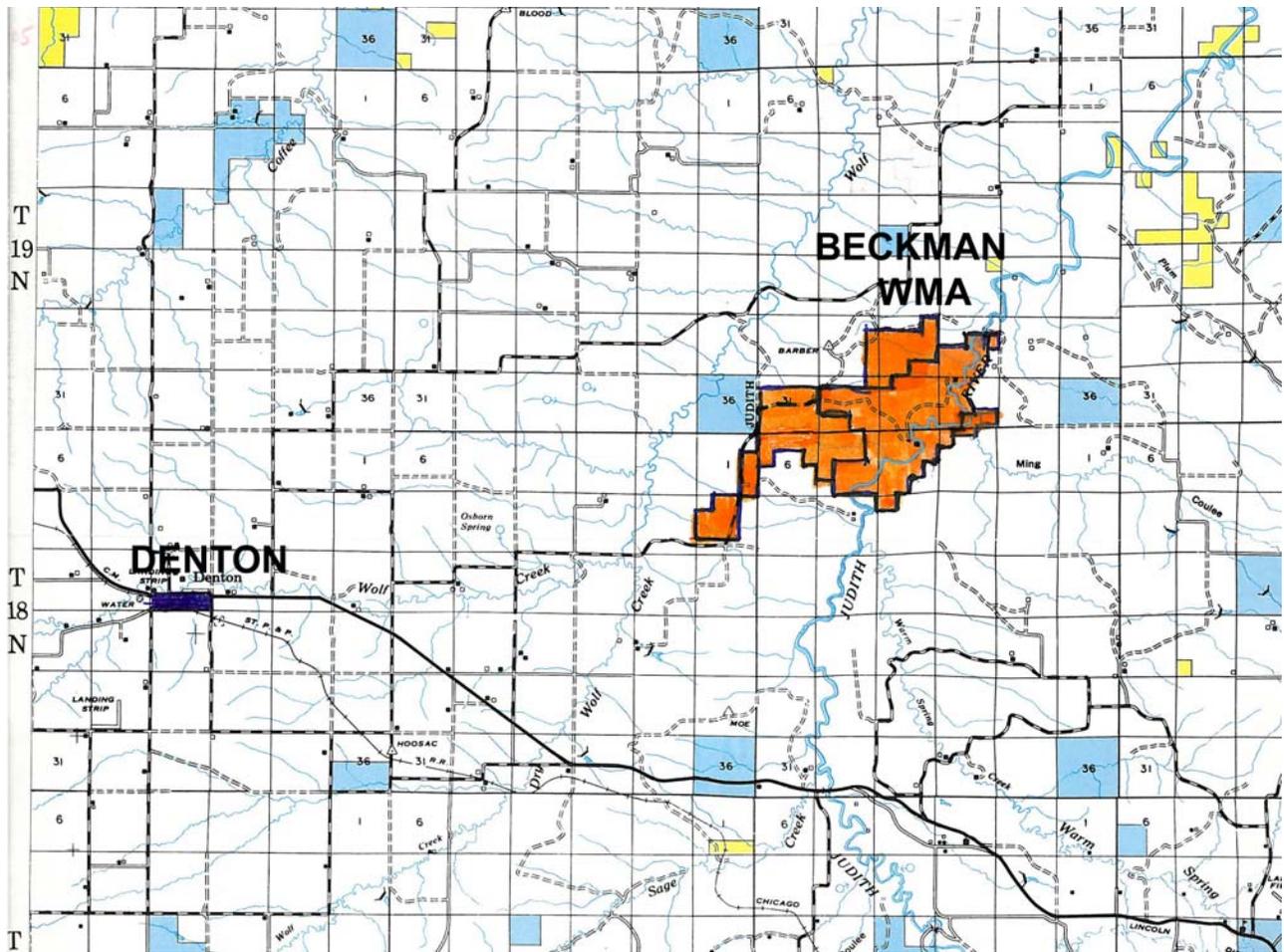
APPENDICES

- I Local and area maps of Glass Property.**
- II Species occurrence list for Beckman WMA.**
- III Preliminary Management Plan.**

Appendix I



Glass Property proposed acquisition highlighted by arrow.



Local proximity map for Beckman WMA and Glass Property.

APPENDIX II

Species listed below occur on the Beckman Wildlife Management Area, to include the Glass Property:

Mammals

Common shrew
 Montana shrew
 Little brown myotis
 Long-eared myotis
 Long-legged myotis
 Small-footed myotis
 Big brown bat
 Hoary bat
 Silver-haired bat
 Townsend's big-eared bat
 Ermine
 Long-tailed weasel

Mink
 River otter
 Badger
 Striped skunk
 Red fox
 Coyote
 Mountain lion
 Bobcat
 Raccoon
 Yellow-bellied marmot
 Richardson's ground squirrel
 Yellow-pine chipmunk
 Red squirrel
 Northern pocket gopher

Deer mouse
 Bushy-tailed wood rat
 Ord's kangaroo rat
 Meadow vole
 Gapper's red-backed vole
 Montane vole
 Prairie vole
 Sagebrush vole
 Western jumping mouse
 Grasshopper mouse
 Beaver
 Muskrat
 Porcupine
 White-tailed jackrabbit

Mountain cottontail
Elk
White-tailed deer
Mule deer
Moose
Pronghorn

Birds (yearlong, seasonal, migratory)

Pintail
Mallard
Gadwall
Blue-winged teal
Cinnamon teal
Green-winged teal
Northern shoveler
American wigeon
Wood duck
Common goldeneye
Common merganser
Canada goose
Great blue heron
Sandhill crane
Common snipe
Turkey vulture
Northern harrier
Sharp-shinned hawk
Cooper's hawk
Brown creeper
Rock wren
Northern goshawk
Swainson's hawk
Red-tailed hawk
Ferruginous hawk
Rough-legged hawk
Bald eagle
Golden eagle
American kestrel
Merlin
Prairie falcon
Gray partridge
Blue grouse
Ruffed grouse
Sharp-tailed grouse
Sage grouse
Merriam's turkey
Ring-necked pheasant
Killdeer
Solitary sandpiper
Long-billed curlew
Rock dove
Mourning dove
Great horned owl
Long-eared owl
Northern pygmy-owl

Short-eared owl
Northern saw-whet owl
Burrowing owl
Common nighthawk
Common poorwill
Rufous hummingbird
Belted kingfisher
Lewis' woodpecker
Yellow-bellied sapsucker
Downy woodpecker
Hairy woodpecker
Northern flicker
Western wood-peewee
Hammond's flycatcher
Dusky flycatcher
Western flycatcher
Say's phoebe
Western kingbird
Eastern kingbird
Horned lark
Tree swallow
Violet-green swallow
Cliff swallow
Barn swallow
Rough-winged swallow
Blue jay
Gray jay
Steller's jay
Pinyon jay
Clark's nutcracker
Black-billed magpie
American crow
Common raven
Black-capped chickadee
Mountain chickadee
Red-breasted nuthatch
White-breasted nuthatch
House wren
Golden-crowned kinglet
Ruby-crowned kinglet
Eastern bluebird
Townsend's solitaire
Swainson's thrush
Hermit thrush
American robin
Gray catbird
Sprague's pipit
Bohemian waxwing
Cedar waxwing
Northern shrike
Loggerhead shrike
European starling
Warbling vireo
Solitary vireo
Yellow warbler

Yellow-rumped warbler
McGillivray's warbler
Common yellowthroat
Wilson's warbler
Western tanager
Lazuli bunting
Spotted towhee
American tree sparrow
Chipping sparrow
Clay-colored sparrow
Brewer's sparrow
Vesper sparrow
Lark sparrow
Savannah sparrow
Grasshopper sparrow
Fox sparrow
Song sparrow
White-crowned sparrow
Dark-eyed junco
Lapland longspur
Snow bunting
Red-winged blackbird
Bobolink
Western meadowlark
Brewer's blackbird
Common grackle
Brown-headed cowbird
Rosy finch
Cassin's finch
House finch
Red crossbill
Common redpoll
Pine siskin
American goldfinch
House sparrow

Amphibians

Tiger salamander
Woodhouse's toad
Western chorus frog
Northern leopard frog

Reptiles

Short-horned lizard
Snapping turtle
Racer
Milk snake
Gopher snake
Western rattlesnake
Common garter snake

**PRELIMINARY MANAGEMENT PLAN
for the
BECKMAN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA**

**Incorporating:
Glass Property**

INTRODUCTION

LeRoy Byron Beckman's Last Will and Testament established the RBB Deer Lands Trust Fund to acquire "WINTER-SUMMER range lands PRIMARILY FOR DEER, as a Public Hunting Ground". Mr. Beckman's Will then instructs the RBB Deer Lands Trust Fund to transfer the title and management of the land to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP).

Because of the 1987 Wildlife Habitat Acquisition Act (House Bill 526) the Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission adopted rules that specify a Preliminary Management Plan be written before any final action shall be taken on newly acquired lands. This Preliminary Management Plan is intended to give an immediate general analysis and to provide the basis for public comment. It is proposed that MFWP incorporate the 80-acre Glass Property into the adjacent Beckman Wildlife Management Area.

The Preliminary Management Plan identifies MFWP's management goals for the property and the adjoining Beckman Wildlife Management Area (BWMA). More specific work activities will be formulated for the final Management Plan after proper inventories have been made, compliance requirements met, and after public comments have been reviewed. Once a final Management Plan is in place, it will be reviewed periodically and necessary adjustments incorporated.

After the Steiners' Trail's End Ranch, the Fertterer, the Green and then the Barber properties were purchased and gifted to MFWP these last 8 years, they became the Beckman Wildlife Management Area. The BWMA is managed by MFWP, primarily for mule and white-tailed deer and upland game birds. Agricultural practices such as producing hay and grazing livestock are used as necessary to meet habitat objectives for the primary wildlife species, and for other wildlife species when appropriate.

AREA DESCRIPTION

Location and Physiographic Characteristics:

The Glass Property (Property) is 80 acres located in the Judith River breaks, Fergus County, 12 miles northeast of Denton, Montana (see map Appendix 1). Combined with the

adjacent Beckman WMA, total acreage will equal 6,644 acres. The Property lies in a single parcel and has a common half-mile boundary with the WMA.

The Judith River flows from the southwest to the northeast across 3.6 miles of the existing WMA. Along the river are almost 1000 acres of bottomlands. The remaining acres are classified as river breaks, including all of the Glass Property. These breaks consist of steep-sided coulees with ridges and gently sloping benches that drain into the bottoms. There are 12 coulees that run water intermittently, in which there are 7 perennial springs.

Elevations of the Property range from 3,100 to 3,300 feet. Bottomlands along the Judith River and Wolf Creek run at elevations from 3020 to 3100 feet. Soils are generally deep well drained clay loams. Annual precipitation ranges from 12 to 16 inches. The mean temperature is 44 degrees Fahrenheit. The average frost-free period is 120 to 130 days.

Legal description of the proposed Project property:

County: Fergus

W 1/2 of the SE ¼ of Section 22, T19N, and R16E.

Total Deeded = 80 acres

The accompanying map (Appendix 1) displays the lands affected by the proposal. The project's exterior boundary is comprised of one block of 80 acres and shares 1/2 mile of common boundary with the existing WMA. Three different private landowners control property bordering the Glass addition. Eleven private landowners share common boundary with the entire WMA. The Judith River runs along the eastern periphery of the Glass Property although it does not cross the property. There are no state or federal lands encumbered or leased in conjunction with this Property or the WMA.

Vegetation

Present

The Beckman WMA is described as river breaks habitat, consisting of 3 major vegetative types. The Ponderosa pine / Douglas fir-juniper type occurs on the more moist aspects of ridges and coulees. A grassland type occupies the drier benches and sidehills and is dominated by western wheatgrass, needle-and-thread and blue grama. Most of the river bottom riparian type consists of cottonwood / willow stands (about 250 acres) and grassland terraces (about 400 acres). The cottonwood / willow stands also have understory vegetation comprised of western snowberry, Wood's rose, chokecherry, silver buffaloberry, and red osier dogwood. Most riparian grassland terraces have been cultivated into alfalfa and tame grass hay fields.

The Glass Property is upland river breaks habitat, consisting primarily of a ponderosa pine / Douglas fir-juniper type and a riparian type which occurs adjacent to the Judith River.

Commercial timber does not exist on the property.

These vegetative types and their associated topographic features make the combined properties year-round habitat for mule and white-tailed deer. Sharp-tailed grouse and pronghorn antelope make significant use of the grassy upland benches. Merriam's turkeys, although uncommon, favor the pine/fir sites. Ring-necked pheasants make extensive use of the riparian vegetation on the river bottom. All of the vegetative types are utilized by a diverse group of small mammals and birds.

The Property has been managed as part of a remote, summer livestock grazing pasture. At present, only random, trespass livestock grazing occurs on the property owing to its size and juxtaposition to other properties. Future grazing schemes will be simplified, as the Glass Property is included in pasture layout and management.

Future

Future grazing schemes will be simplified, as the Glass Property is included in pasture layout and management in association with larger grazing system(s) on the BWMA if they develop.

Travel Plan

Present

Public motor vehicle access on the existing WMA is by means of two graveled county roads: one that enters on the western border and continues into the center of the property, ending at the WMA headquarter buildings on the river bottom; the other along the Bear Springs Road to the Property's north side. Another vehicular trail splits off of the county road and provides access to the north portion of the WMA, ending in a designated parking area. Other unimproved dirt roads (closed to public access) on the Property lead to almost every field or pasture.

The Glass Property is accessible to the general public via foot travel from adjacent private lands with landowner permission and via the adjoining Beckman WMA. Additional foot access may be pursued through enrollment of neighboring properties into MFWP's Block Management Program.

Future

Motorized vehicles will be allowed seasonally on the two existing designated roads on the WMA. These roads will lead to 2 designated parking areas located on the river bottom at road end (Map 1). Continued access along the county road as it passes the WMA will be allowed. Public access by foot or horseback will be allowed off-road from April 1 to January 1, annually, on all acres.

It is intended that a designated and improved public parking area will be established in conjunction with the 'USAF missile silo' access easement on WMA property.

Motorized vehicles will not be allowed off of the designated roads except for administrative use and/or the current agricultural lessees or contractors.

Camping is allowed on the Beckman WMA in any of the designated parking/camping areas. Camping rules comply with MFWP Administrative Rule 12-8-205, which limits camping in designated camping areas to 14 days and prohibits camps from being left unattended for more than 48 hours. Primitive overnight camping will be allowed outside of designated parking/camping areas along the river. Primitive camps will be allowed for a duration of 1 night and must be packed in by foot or boat.

Physical Developments

Present

Existing physical developments on the Beckman WMA include external boundary fences (fair condition), internal pasture fences (poor to good condition), 1 older home, 1 older barn (fair condition), a set of corrals (fair condition), 3 wells associated with the residence/corrals, and 1 developed spring (fair condition). There are also 3 electric pump irrigation systems (gated pipe, wheel line and hand line), and 1 flood irrigation system, that are in fair condition.

Addition of the Glass Property brings with it no physical improvements and no water rights.

Future

Internal pasture fences may be removed and/or constructed to accommodate any needed pasture realignment.

Wildlife

Present

Current wildlife use of the property includes the following animals (and/or groups of animals) and their present levels of use:

Primary species are mule and white-tailed deer. Mule deer occupy the upland coulees and ridges yearlong, but often make daily use of the alfalfa fields on the river bottom during periods when upland vegetation is desiccated. Mule deer numbers on the property fluctuate within and between years. Highest numbers are found during spring and fall. Through the years the lowest number of mule deer counted was 60, the highest number was 200. White-tailed deer, conversely, occupy the river bottoms yearlong except for brief forays to the uplands. Over the years their numbers have fluctuated between 20 and 50.

Approximately 20 antelope utilize the WMA and Property intermittently on a seasonal basis. Mountain lions utilize the area occasionally, while bobcat, coyote, fox, badger and skunk are more common.

Merriam's turkey utilize the property during late spring, summer and early fall. Merriam's turkeys are present throughout the timbered coulees of the Property. A variety of songbirds, raptors, and small mammals use the area in undermined numbers on a seasonal or yearlong basis.

Future

Upon acquisition of the Property, habitat management strategies will be directed towards improving the habitat and carrying capacity for mule and white-tailed deer, pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse, and other ground nesting waterfowl species. Other wildlife species adapted to more residual and woody vegetative cover, as well as agricultural crops such as alfalfa, will benefit. Predator species associated with prey that prefer such habitats will increase in number. Wildlife species that are adapted to exploit heavily utilized habitats will decline.

AREA MANAGEMENT

Management Goals

The primary goal for management of the Beckman WMA, including addition of the Glass acres, will be to improve the condition of all vegetative plant communities. Implicit in this goal is a focus to maximize the productivity of the land base while minimizing maintenance and management requirements/involvement. Increased carrying capacities for mule and white-tailed deer can be expected as vegetation conditions improve and adequate quantities of forage remain available during key seasonal periods (e.g., winter and spring). This should reduce deer use of adjacent landowner's crops and pasture lands. The improvement of the habitat for mule and white-tailed deer will also benefit other game and nongame wildlife species.

A second and equally important goal will be to provide public access to the property for sport hunting and other recreational pursuits.

Management Actions

The most essential and important components of a wildlife management area are soil and vegetation. Every management action on the Area will be aimed at maintaining or improving the condition of vegetation and soils. Vegetative manipulations to improve habitat for wildlife may include livestock grazing, rest from livestock grazing, chemical and mechanical treatment, prescribed burning, and/or other common land management practices.

A change from present grazing practices to other grazing practices can be expected over time. This may include continuation of livestock grazing, but under a system that incorporates different stocking rates and more rest and rotation of pastures. Initial efforts will focus on quantifying the condition and trend of existing vegetation and establishing long-term monitoring efforts.

Biological, chemical, and mechanical treatments may be employed to reduce the occurrence of noxious weeds, to renovate or establish hay/farm land, to establish stands of woody vegetation, and/or to stimulate rangeland vegetation. All MFWP actions to control noxious weeds will be in accordance with the Department's weed management policy.

The use of fire may be prescribed to manipulate plant communities. An example would be to modify plant successional stages to increase the occurrence of desired shrub species. Any such effort would be made in coordination with adjacent landowners and state and county officials.

Public use and access to the property will be managed consistent with MFWP's state and regional management objectives for WMA's. Recreation on the Beckman WMA is expected to increase. Deer and upland bird harvest in the area is expected to increase. Public use of the area will be consistent with resource protection goals (i.e., vegetation and soil stability). A winter use closure to all unauthorized activities will be implemented to address wildlife energetic needs (i.e., minimize the energy loss for deer and upland birds during energetically demanding/critical periods). This winter closure concept is in effect on all wildlife management areas within MFWP's Region 4. Other regulations as they specifically relate to this and other WMA's will also apply. These include permit-only fur trapping activities and a closure to mountain lion hunting after January 1.

MFWP will coordinate with adjacent landowners in developing certain land management plans/practices. These may include, but are not limited to: cooperative grazing systems, developing land trades, conservation easements, and/or additional land purchases. All practices will be considered first to conform to the intent of Mr. Beckman's Last Will and Testament. MFWP will promote its block management and hunting access programs with adjacent landowners affected by the acquisition of the Beckman WMA and subsequently, the Glass Property. Public entities such as the Bureau of Land Management, Farm Services Agency, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Fergus County Conservation District, Fergus County Extension Service, and the Fergus County Commissioners will be consulted and met with as requested and needed.

An annual "in lieu of taxes" payment will be made by MFWP to Fergus County in a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment of the property were it taxable to a private citizen (MCA 87-1-603).

Management Objectives

Manipulating vegetative plant communities on the Beckman WMA is expected to increase yearlong usage by mule and white-tailed deer, sharp-tailed grouse, and pheasants. The population objective is to have 120 mule deer and 60 white-tailed deer on the WMA during early fall. The population objective for ring-necked pheasants is to increase the number of males in spring to 5X the current number. The population objective for sharp-tailed grouse is to increase total numbers by 2X.

MFWP will continue its aggressive approach to weed management on the Beckman WMA. Noxious weeds will be identified, mapped, and controlled in a manner consistent with MFWP's Region 4 Weed Management Plan. There are 2 objectives for weed management on the Beckman WMA. (1) Stop the spread of noxious weeds, and (2) reduce the occurrence of noxious weeds on the Beckman WMA. MFWP will use its own personnel and/or private contractors, and coordinate with adjacent landowners and county weed boards for weed control.

Impacts

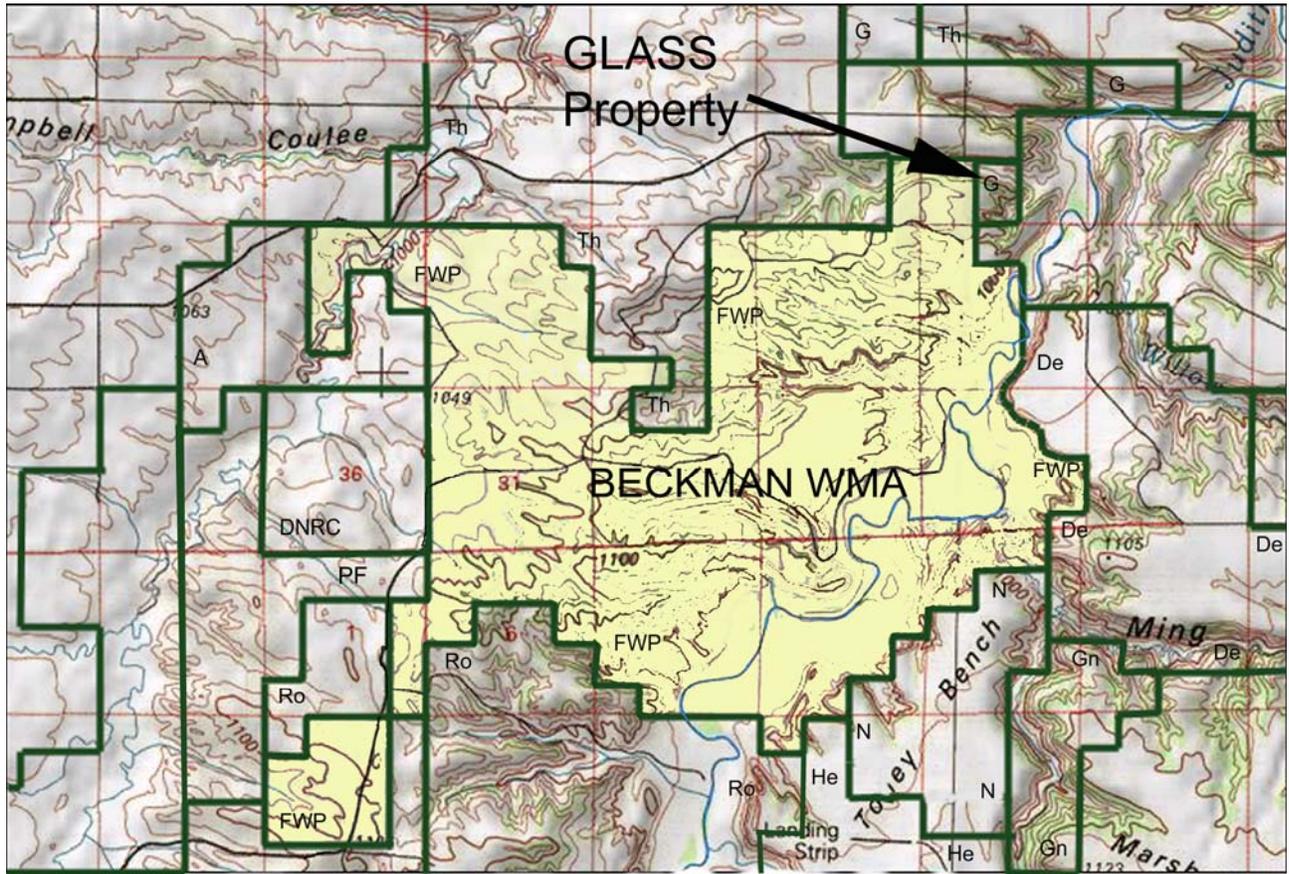
Proposed changes in management direction for the Beckman WMA -- adjustments to some land use practices -- will benefit the wildlife currently using the area. Improving habitat quality and quantity will assist in alleviating potential deer problems on adjacent private lands. Should game depredation occur, one or more of the following methods will be implemented: scare guns; temporary panels for haystacks; materials for permanent haystack yards; kill permits; and special hunting seasons. A combination of the above methods would be used as necessary to resolve problems that might occur.

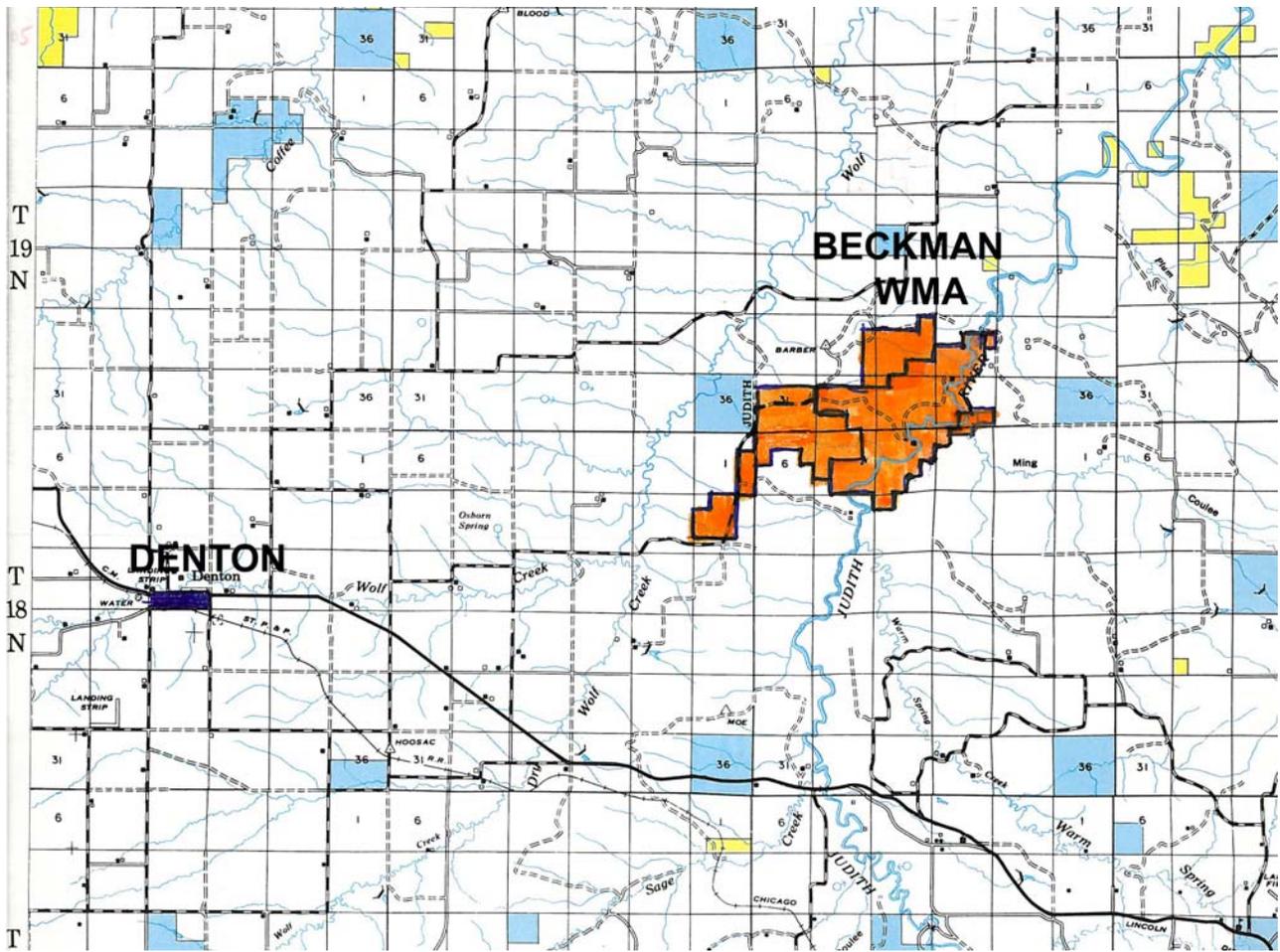
Public use of the property will be guaranteed from April 1 through January 1. Use during this period will be consistent with the established management/travel plan.

Management Activities

Aerial and ground surveys and inventories of wildlife use of the area will be conducted. The area will be used on occasion for capturing and individually marking deer and other wildlife as research needs arise. Changes in numbers and patterns of use by deer and other big game and wildlife species will be documented. Vegetation sampling and evaluation will be conducted on a regular basis. Other land management specialists and agencies will be contacted as needed for technical assistance in order to implement specified management actions. Physical developments will be evaluated relative to management goals and objectives. Historic and cultural values and a final management plan will dictate the extent of physical development and activity that's needed. Entrance and boundary signs will be erected to facilitate public use and to inform the public of the benefits and opportunities in the area.

Appendix I





Local proximity map for Beckman WMA and Glass Property.