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LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL
POLICY OFFICE

DECISION NOTICE
Red Hill Road-East Fork Access
Region 4 Headquarters
4600 Giant Springs Road,
Great Falls MT 59405
(406) 454-5840

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) proposes to purchase a 40 acre parcel of grazing, agricultural and forest lands in the Big Snowy Mountains, approximately 20 miles south of Lewistown, MT from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF). This parcel borders mainly private land, but contains a ~30 foot corner overlap (hereafter, public access point) of United States Forest Service (USFS; Lewis and Clark National Forest, Judith Ranger District) land. This purchase would increase public access in the Big Snowy Mountains, Fergus County, MT. Funding will be provided by MFWP's Access Public Lands (APL) program. If the property is acquired, a parking area, non-motorized trail and signage will be established that leads to this public access point onto USFS property, thereby minimizing private land trespass issues in the area. A wildlife-friendly border fence will also be constructed to mark the property boundaries and limit trespass by livestock.

MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT PUBLIC PROCESS AND COMMENT

FWP is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of its proposed actions to the human and physical environments, evaluate those impacts through an interdisciplinary approach, including public input, and make a decision based on this information. FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for public review of this proposal (Red Hill Road Access) on September 13, 2013 and accepted public comment until 5:00 P. M. on October 13, 2013.

Notice of the proposal and availability of the Draft EA was published in the *Lewistown News Argus, Great Falls Tribune* and the *Billings Gazette*. Copies of the environmental assessment were distributed to neighboring landowners and interested individuals, groups, and agencies to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project. The EA was available for public review on FWP's web site (http://fwp.mt.gov/, "Recent Public Notices" and "Submit Public Comments") from September 13, 2013 through October 13, 2013. An FWP statewide news release was issued September 13, 2013 and posted on FWP's website (http://fwp.mt.gov/, "News Releases") the same day.

A public informational meeting was held in Lewistown, MT on September 26. Approximately 44 members of the public attended and were subsequently asked to render their opinion on the Proposal through established lines of comment. Those comments are further considered below.

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT

FWP received 51 total comments (42 online, 5 during the public hearing, and 4 via mail). Of the 51 total comments, 49 were in support of the proposal, 2 did not specify (individuals simply left a suggestive comment or a question), and 0 opposed it.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENT

Below are FWP responses to summarized comments addressing issues of mutual concern and interest. For ease of response, similar comments are grouped together if they express a similar view.

Comment: *With changes in land ownership in the area, and a notable lack of access in the Snowies, this project will provide access to public lands for both hunting and also, non-hunting recreation. These are the kind of purchases FWP should be looking for. Please find more opportunities like this.*

FWP Response: FWP is committed to finding and working on more access opportunities, whether via access programs to private lands or access to public lands. Access benefits not only hunting and helps FWP meet its management goals for wildlife, but also benefits the non-hunting recreating public.

Comment: *I normally don't believe in government land purchases using tax-payers' dollars, but as long as FWP has the resources to maintain the property I am in support of this access opportunity. FWP needs to do their homework and make sure the access point is actually there.*

FWP Response: Funding for this acquisition comes from FWP's "Access Public Lands" program, funded entirely by sportsmen (through the "Home to Hunt" license sales) and not through state or federal taxes. The property, including the "public access point" has been officially surveyed and the 29.27-foot overlap providing access to Lewis and Clark National Forest has been confirmed.

Comment: *Please make sure the property is well-signed to prevent inadvertent trespassing on neighboring private lands.*

FWP Response: The public access point and boundary of the property have been properly signed to prevent trespassing onto neighboring private lands. The trail leading up to the public access point has been bladed and signed and is easily discernible.

Comment: *This new "non-motorized path" on state land will be designed to accommodate administrative ATV use. There may well be good reasons why ATVs are needed for administrative use, but it wasn't explained in the EA. More important, the EA doesn't explain how recreational ATV users will be prevented from trespassing onto the non-motorized trail, or how the trail restrictions will be enforced. There are plenty of examples on national forest lands where trail restrictions have been or are being ignored by ATV users. Is some type of restrictive barrier being considered to prevent or at least make more difficult, ATV access onto the non-motorized areas??*

FWP Response: Administrative ATV use will cover activities such as fence construction of the boundary fence (e.g., using a post-pounder), fence-maintenance, weed-spraying, and other needs. The property will be signed for "non-motorized use," and via game warden and Forest Service ranger patrolling, and public reporting, we anticipate most violations to be reported enforced. A restrictive barrier at the parking area to prevent vehicular use is being considered.

Comment: *In the draft EA, the National Forest (NF) lands are inaccurately described as inaccessible. True, the NF lands adjacent to the proposed acquisition currently have difficult access because of distance, terrain, vegetation, etc. However, those features that make access difficult are highly valued by some members of the public for the opportunity for solitude. It should be acknowledged in the EA that the proposed acquisition would decrease the level of difficulty in accessing the NF lands. Therefore, the level of public use of those lands would likely increase. For the recreationists that enjoy maximum opportunity for solitude, those opportunities would likely decrease.*

FWP Response: The draft environmental assessment will be amended to illustrate that access is "improved" to Lewis and Clark National Forest with this acquisition. While it is expected that during the relative novelty of this property it will receive a fair amount of use, the extent of the area this acquisition provides access to will still allow privacy for those who seek solitude. Increased access to National Forest lands via this parcel may also better disperse recreationists and hunters using other areas of the forest, reducing crowding in other areas.

Comment: *Increased public use of this area would increase the rate of what few elk there are moving to higher-quality adjacent private land.*

FWP Response: Elk on and around this property are common but not present in high densities. Also, given that this property improves access to nearly 18,000 acres of public land, it provides a relatively large amount of room for hunters to disperse. Neighboring private lands are currently outfitted and see hunting pressure, which should also balance out the hunting activity provided by this access point.

Comment: *In regard to impact, the inclusion of "East Fork Access" to the title of the EA might be problematic. There are no established pack trails leading into the East Fork drainage from the proposed access site. I am concerned about members of the public who may be misled, and either end up lost and hurt, or cause resource damage by blazing trees. While I favor FWP's acquisition of this parcel, I strongly urge FWP to caution the public on the limitations involved in this particular access, as to educate the public in regard to the rules, regulations and respect to the land use status of the Forest Service.*

FWP Response: Ultimately it is the responsibility of the public to be prepared while recreating in the outdoors. The Forest Service may work with private groups or other organizations to construct a trail leading into the East Fork in the future; however plans are not in place at this time. FWP has signed the property with "primitive camping area" signs and a listing of WMA rules, and the public land beyond will be subject to the same National Forest rules as other public access areas in the Snowies.

Comment: *I hope plans include a nice trail connecting the old East Fork of Big Spring Creek trail. After this trail is restored it will be an amazing addition to Central Montana recreation. It would be great to have future plans of a new trail system in this area, Dry Canyon etc. and connect all these trails so great loops can be made connecting Half moon, the Uhlhorn trail all the way to Crystal Lake as well as Cottonwood Creek trail.*

FWP Response: Lewis and Clark National Forest may work with private citizens and organizations to further develop a trail system in the future as time and funding allows. Such consideration is beyond the scope of this Assessment.

Comment: *I am a land owner on Red Hill Rd, and I have concerns pertaining to high-powered rifles, open fires, and people parking in my driveway. I would like a safety zone placed along Red Hill Rd, and fire restrictions, and I do not want to see people parking or trespassing on my driveway.*

FWP Response: The Red Hill Access Area will be subject to Wildlife Management Area (WMA) rules, which

cover issues such as camping, target shooting, and fire restrictions. Visitors arriving to use the Red Hill Access Area are directed by signs to park within the property or along the west side of the road. Any land owner concerned about the possibility of a gate being blocked or a driveway accessed can sign their property and notify law enforcement if these postings are violated. A parking area has been constructed on the interior of the property with enough room to permit multiple vehicles, including vehicles with horse trailers. An area along the property periphery and Red Hill Road has been sufficiently widened to allow for parking space during periods of snow accumulation. It is likely that winter activity will be limited to intermittent snow-shoeing and/or cross-country skiing, therefore an abundance of vehicles will not be likely when the area is snowed in and parking is limited.

Comment: *One potential issue not addressed in the EA is how the new access point might affect elk security over the long run and what actions would be taken if management objectives are not being met?*

FWP Response: Part of this area is characterized by rough topography and there are no roads in this immediate area of National Forest. Therefore elk security issues caused by increased public access will be minimal. Elk in the Snowy Management Unit are currently above objective and will remain so until further access opportunities (particularly on lower-elevation private lands) are realized.

Comment: *I would like to see no fishing in the East Fork bowl - those native fish have survived because access is so limited.*

FWP Response: FWP does not foresee any negative impacts to native fish populations with this access area. However, if issues and concerns arise relative to the East Fork fishery, they will be addressed by Fisheries Management staff.

Comment: *Will FWP* be *monitoring the amount of vehicles in the parking area? I don't want the land to be over-hunted. Consider a check-in box perhaps? And please, no outhouse!*

FWP Response: While activity at the opening of this access area may be relatively busy, the area will likely receive use similar to other areas of access into the Big Snowy Mountains (e.g., Lost Peak Trail, Uhlhorn Trail/Halfmoon Pass, etc.). The Forest Service does not currently monitor vehicle numbers or recreational use in these areas. Plans for an outhouse are not currently considered or addressed in the EA.

Comment: *Constructing a campground would be nice, as well as a trailhead with room to turn around horse trailers.*

FWP Response: Plans for a campground are not currently in the works, but primitive camping using a Pack It In-Pack It Out approach is allowed on the property and addressed in WMA rules, which will also govern the use of this access area. A parking area has been identified and signed that provides sufficient area for several vehicles, campers, and/or horse trailers.

DECISION NOTICE

Utilizing the draft EA and public comment, a decision must be rendered by FWP which addresses any additional concerns and issues identified for this proposed action. FWP's analysis supports acquiring the 40-acre parcel from the RMEF to deliver additional access to public land in the Big Snowy Mountains and the Lewis and Clark National Forest as proposed.

I find there to be no significant impacts on the human and physical environments associated with this project. Therefore, I conclude that the Environmental Assessment is the appropriate level of analysis, and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

After review of this proposal, it is my decision to accept the draft EA as supplemented/modified by this Decision Notice and the response to public comment contained herein. In combination, these documents constitute the Final EA. I recommend acquisition of the parcel as a point of public access to public land known as the Red Hill Road Access.

This Decision Notice may be viewed on FWP's Internet website: http://www.fwp.mt.gov or be obtained upon request from Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, Region 4 Headquarters, 4600 Giant Springs Road, Great Falls, MT 59405 at (406) 454-5840.

October 28, 2013

Gary Bertellotti
R4 Regional Supervisor

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NOV 01 2013
LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENTAL
POLICY OFFICE

Draft
Environmental Assessment

Proposed Red Hill Road – East Fork Access
Land Acquisition

September 11, 2013

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Red Hill Road – East Fork Access Acquisition
Draft Environmental Assessment

PART I: PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) proposes to purchase a 40 acre parcel of grazing, agricultural and forest lands in the Big Snowy Mountains, approximately 20 miles south of Lewistown, MT from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF). This parcel borders mainly private land, but contains a ~30 foot corner overlap (hereafter, public access point) of United States Forest Service (USFS; Lewis and Clark National Forest, Judith Ranger District) land. This purchase would increase public access in the Big Snowy Mountains, Fergus County, MT. Funding will be provided by MFWP's Access Public Lands (APL) program. If the property is acquired, a parking area, non-motorized trail and signage will be established that leads to this public access point onto USFS property, thereby minimizing private land trespass issues in the area. A wildlife-friendly border fence will also be constructed to mark the property boundaries and limit trespass by livestock.

2. Agency authority for the proposed action

MCA statute (87-1-265) authorizes MFWP to establish programs that encourage public access to private and public lands for the purpose of hunting. Acquisition or lease of lands or rights of way, or other arrangement for public access across private property must be negotiated on a cooperative basis and may only be initiated with the voluntary participation of private landowners. The Fish and Wildlife Commission and State Land Board (depending upon size and/or value of project) must approve acquisitions of land and easements proposed by the agency. This environmental assessment (EA) is part of this decision-making process.

3. Name of Project

Red Hill Road – East Fork Access Acquisition

4. Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Red Hill Road – East Fork Access Acquisition EA
PO Box 938
Lewistown, MT 59457

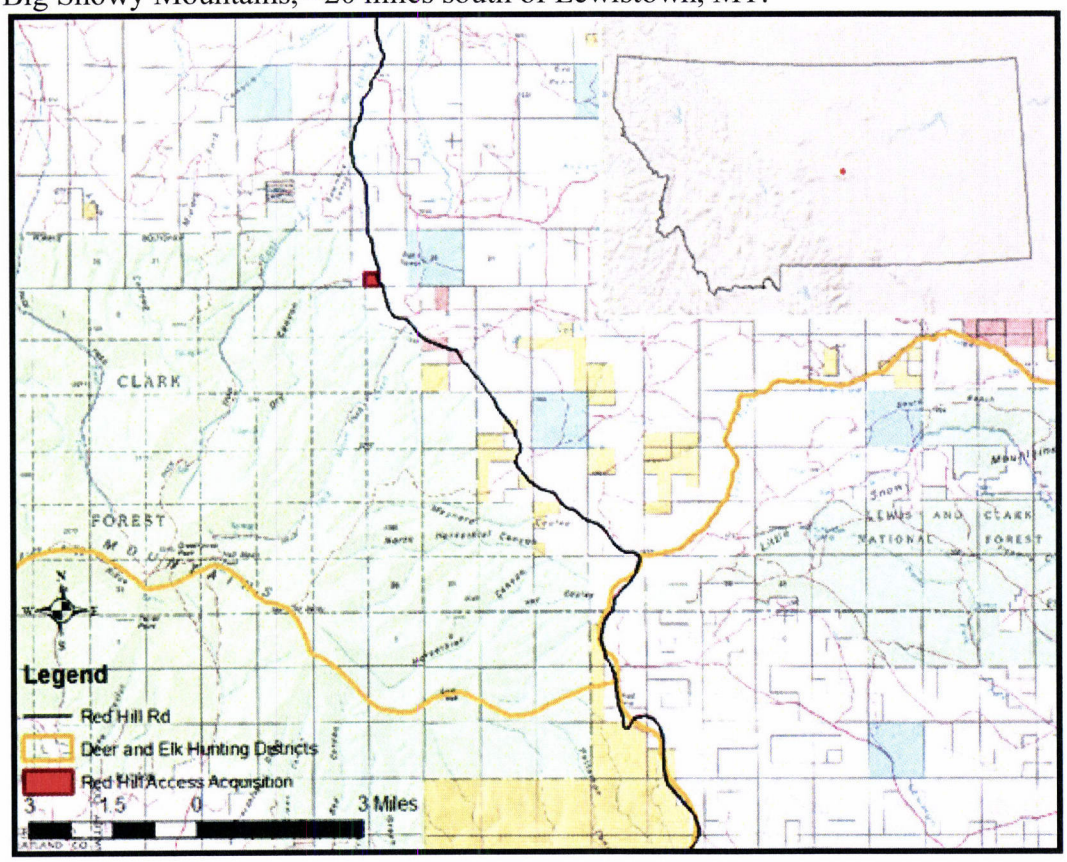
(406) 538-4658 ext. 228

5. If Applicable:

Estimated Construction/Commencement Date:	Fall 2013
Estimated Completion Date:	Fall 2013/Spring 2014

6. **Location Affected by Proposed Action (county, range and township)**
The Red Hill Road – East Fork Access Acquisition is located in Township 13 North, Range 19 East, and Section 35 (SE/4SW/4) in Fergus County, MT. The proposed acquisition is 40 acres. The parcel is located along Red Hill Road in the northeastern Big Snowy Mountains, Lewis and Clark National Forest (Judith Ranger District), approximately 20 miles south of Lewistown, MT (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Location of Red Hill Road – East Fork Access Acquisition (Red section) in the Big Snowy Mountains, ~20 miles south of Lewistown, MT.



7. **Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently (40 total acres)**

(a) Developed
Residential..... 0 acres
Industrial..... 0 acres

(b) Open Space/Woodlands/
Recreation..... 0 acres

(c) Wetlands/Riparian
Areas.....0 acres

(d) Floodplain.....0 acres

(e) Productive
Irrigated cropland.....0 acres
Dry cropland..... 0 acres
Forestry.....26.2 acres
Rangeland.....13.8 acres
Other..... 0 acres

8. Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction

(a) Permits: None Required

Agency Name	Permit	Date Filed
NA	NA	NA

(b) Funding: $50,000

Agency Name	Funding Amount
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks APL (acquisition)	$50,000
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (improvements)	~$6,000

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities

Agency Name	Type of Responsibility
NA	NA

9. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action

The Red Hill Road – East Fork Access Acquisition is a proposal to purchase a 40 acre parcel to improve access to Lewis and Clark National Forest lands in the Big Snowy Mountains, Fergus County, MT (Judith Ranger District; Figure 1). The property is primarily range and woodland and contains an ephemeral stream. Adjacent private land north, west and south east is primarily the Lewis Ranch) and public land is USFS to the southwest of this parcel. This and surrounding areas receive high use by elk, mule deer, black bear, mountain grouse and turkey, and provide hunting opportunities for each species. Elk are currently >400% above objective in the Snowy Elk Management Unit, mainly due to lack of hunting access. Private lands surrounding this parcel are currently outfitted or provide no public access to this area of Lewis and Clark National Forest. This property includes a 29.27-foot overlapping corner (public access point; Figure 2) that provides legal access to thousands of acres of currently inaccessible USFS lands. Currently, public access to USFS is limited to access via a few portions of Bureau of Land Management lands along Red Hill Road further south. These access points do not provide adequate public access to the East Fork drainage, due to steep topography and cliffs south of this property. Due to land ownership and topography, this property would provide the only practical public hunting access into the East Fork of Big Spring Creek drainage, approximately 18,000 acres of USFS lands.

There are no buildings of significance, water developments or other improvements on the property. There are also no water rights associated with this property per a search of the Montana Department of Natural Resources Water Rights database. The property has been appropriately surveyed relative to the public access point. MFWP pays taxes "in a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment were it taxable to a private citizen" (MCA 87-1-603). Property taxes on the parcel in 2012 totaled $20.80.

If the property is acquired, several improvements to facilitate public access will be made: (1) An existing gate adjacent to the county road will be widened into a 20-ft wire gate

with mechanical closure and moved down the perimeter fence. At the gate opening, minor bank sloping will be done to remove a steep bank, and small (< 8-ft) trees will be removed to allow vehicular access to an old section of county road within the property boundary. This old road section will be used as a driveway onto a flat location ~100 yards down, allowing for vehicles (including horsetrailers) to have adequate space for parking and turning around. (2) Beginning at the parking area, a defined access trail will be developed. Minimal work other than brush clearing needs to be done prior to a steep hill section because a clearly-defined cattle trail provides a natural path through part of the property. MFWP will hire a contractor with appropriate equipment to blade/excavate a trail route ~1126-ft across the hillside to the top of the hill, and then scrape/define a trail to the public access point. This will provide a clearly-delineated non-motorized path for public use and an ATV-accessible trail for administrative use. Deadfall and several live trees may need to be removed to facilitate this path. (3) Signage will be placed at the USFS access point, around the perimeter, and signage with maps will be placed at the parking area showing the layout for proper access. (4) the existing perimeter fence will need reconstruction with wildlife-friendly fencing to limit trespass by livestock and public trespass on neighboring private land (Figure 3). The property would be subject to Wildlife Management Area (WMA) rules with regards to camping, target shooting, etc.

Figure 2. Red Hill Road Acquisition Access map showing public access point between USFS and private parcel (T13N, R19E, SESW Section 35).

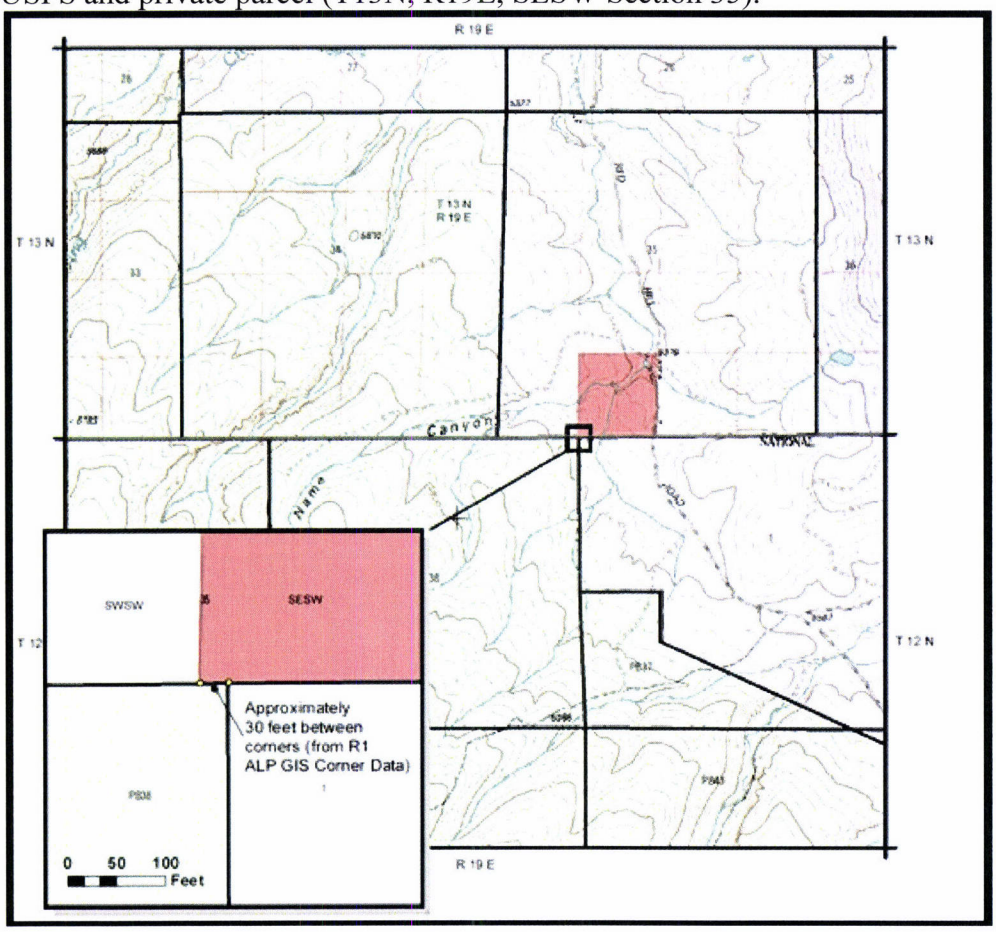
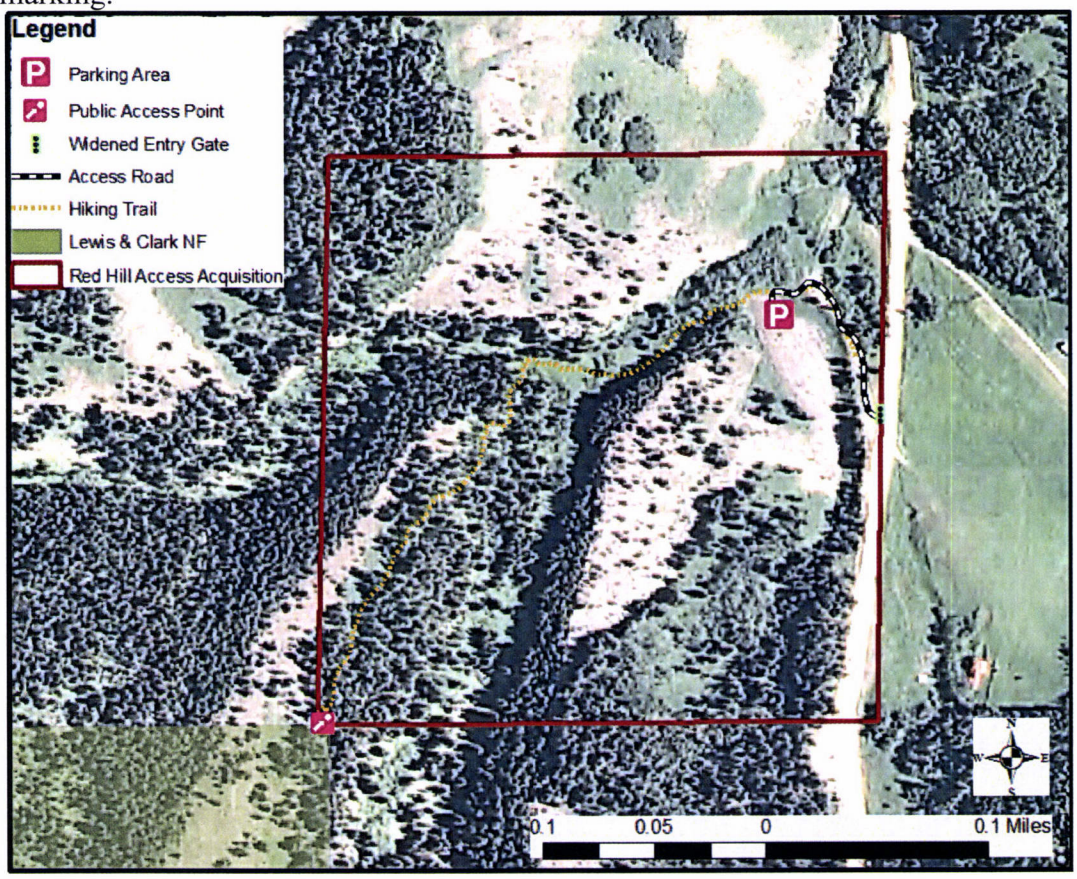


Figure 3. Red Hill Road Acquisition Access aerial photograph showing proposed management actions: parking lot improvement, trail marking, public access point marking.



PART II: ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives:

Alternative A: No Action

If the No Action alternative were adopted, MFWP would not purchase the property from RMEF and public access to USFS lands in this area of the Big Snowy Mountains would continue to be limited, thus negatively impacting hunting opportunities in the area. RMEF would pursue a purchase agreement with another entity.

Alternative B: Purchase the Red Hill Road – East Fork Access Property

The preferred alternative is to purchase the 40 acre Red Hill Road property, providing public access to ~18,000 acres of USFS lands and improved public hunting opportunity. This alternative would satisfy MFWP's objectives in providing public access and recreational opportunities to the public as well as better managing an over-objective elk population. Following the acquisition MFWP would improve a parking area, create a non-motorized trail and establish signage that leads to the public access point and helps minimize private land trespass issues. A wildlife-friendly border fence will also be

constructed to mark the property boundaries and limit trespass by livestock. The property is in a good location and laid out topographically to provide easy and safe access to these public lands. The area is expected to receive use due to its close proximity to Lewistown, MT and the elk hunting opportunity it will provide.

2. **Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency**
Not applicable

PART III: NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The proposed project consists of transfer of ownership from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to MFWP and improvement of a parking area and non-motorized trail, new fencing and placement of signs to mark the perimeter and access point to Lewis and Clark National Forest. No additional construction, improvements or land management activities are included in this proposal. The property would be managed as under MFWP WMA rules. This analysis did not reveal any significant impacts to the human or physical environment.

PART IV: PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

1. **Public Involvement:**

At present, there has been little public involvement other than a record of and endorsement by the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission to pursue acquisition of the property in partnership with RMEF. Once the RMEF completes the purchase of this property from the landowner, the public will be notified in the following ways to comment on MFWP's acquisition of the property and this environmental assessment (EA):

1. Notices will be published in the *Lewistown News-Argus*, *Great Falls Tribune*, and the *Billings Gazette*.
2. Notice and this draft EA will be posted on the MFWP website (http://fwp.mt.gov/home/publicComments.html#).
3. Draft EAs will be available at the MFWP Region 4 headquarters in Great Falls, the Lewistown Area Resource Office in Lewistown, and the MFWP State headquarters in Helena.
4. A news release will be prepared and distributed to a standard list of media outlets interested in FWP Region 4 issues.
5. A public meeting will be held in Lewistown, MT where the public can comment on the acquisition and management of the property.

This level of public involvement is appropriate for a project of this scale and scope.

2. **Duration of comment period:**

The public comment period will be 30 days spanning from September 13, 2013 to October 13, 2013. Comments may be e-mailed to sonjasmith@mt.gov, or written comments may be sent to the following address:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
ATTN: Red Hill Road – East Fork Access Acquisition EA
PO Box 938
Lewistown, MT 59457

PART V: EA PREPERATION

1. **Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required?**
   No, an EIS is not required.

2. **If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action**
   Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment stemming from the acquisition of this Red Hill Road property from the RMEF, this assessment revealed no significant negative impacts from the proposed action: therefore, an EIS is not necessary and an EA is the appropriate level of analysis.

3. **Person responsible for preparing the EA**
   Sonja Smith
   Area Wildlife Biologist
   PO Box 938
   Lewistown, MT 59457
   (406) 538-4658 ext. 228

4. **List of agencies consulted during the preparation of the EA**
   Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
   - Wildlife Division
   - Lands Section

   United States Forest Service
   Montana Natural Heritage Program – Natural Resources Information System (NRIS)

PART VI: MEPA CHECKLIST

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. LAND RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?			X			1a
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X			1b
c. Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in sillation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other		X				

1a. The proposed action involves a transfer of ownership of property, improvement of a parking area, construction of a trail and perimeter fence, and signing the property and access point. Future management actions for the new property would be evaluated in separate analyses. Trail improvement will consist of excavation and blading work on approximately 200 yards of trail leading up to the public access point. The trail will be a non-motorized trail but will be wide enough for ATV access for administrative purposes only.

1b. Excavation and blading of the trail leading up to USFS access will result in minor changes in soil structure which will disrupt and displace some soil and may result in minor erosion at the site of the trail only. Due to non-motorized and occasional ATV traffic over the trail, compaction may also result. However, the environmental effects from trail construction and use would not override the benefits created by limiting traffic to a particular area – reducing trampling, compaction, and weed spread over the rest of the property. There may also be some minor leveling of the parking area which exists as an old section of the county road, using existing gravel on site.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

2. AIR Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Emission or air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (see also 13(c))		X				2a
b. Creation of objectionable odors?		X				
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions or pollutants?		X				
e. For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (see also 2a)		NA				
f. Other		X				

2a. The proposed action involves a transfer of ownership of property, improvement of a parking area, construction of a trail and perimeter fence, and signing the property and access point. Future management actions for the new property would be evaluated in separate analyses. Heavy construction equipment will likely be required for the establishment of the parking lot and installation of the perimeter fencing. Emissions from the equipment will be temporary and will not alter the overall ambient air quality at the property.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

3. WATER Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				3a
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of flood water or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water-related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (see also 3c)		NA				
m. For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (see also 3a)		NA				
n. Other		X				

3a. The proposed action involves a transfer of ownership of property, improvement of a parking area, construction of a trail and perimeter fence, and signing the property and access point. Future management actions for the new property would be evaluated in separate analyses.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

4. VEGETATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?		X				4a
b. Alteration of a plant community?		X				
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				4c
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X		Yes	4e
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		NA				
g. Other		X				

4a. The proposed action involves a transfer of ownership of property, improvement of a parking area, construction of a trail and perimeter fence, and signing the property and access point. Future management actions for the new property would be evaluated in separate analyses. Removal of deadfall and some live trees may be necessary during trail construction.

4c. Upon searching the Montana Natural Heritage Program's species of concern database, one plant species of concern (Long-styled Thistle, *Cirsium longistylum*) was found with overlapping potential distribution within the property boundaries. However, no observations of this plant species have been made within the property boundaries (August 23, 2013).

4e. If acquired, the spread of noxious weeds via vehicular use around the parking area and public use is possible. MFWP would work with the Fergus County Weed District to complete a weed inspection of the property and address any noxious weeds found within the property boundary through an approved weed management plan. MFWP would also work to implement a control program for noxious weeds, similar to the system completed on MFWP WMAs. This system uses a combination of biological, mechanical, and herbicidal treatments to control noxious weeds; the use of herbicides would be in compliance with application guidelines and applied by people trained in handling techniques.

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

5. FISH/WILDLIFE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				5a
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			X		Yes	5b
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?		X				
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				5f
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?			X		Yes	5g
h. For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (also see 5f)		X				
i. For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (also see 5d)		X				
j. Other		X				

5a. The proposed action involves a transfer of ownership of property, improvement of a parking area, construction of a trail and perimeter fence, and signing the property and access point. Future management actions would be evaluated in separate analyses.

5b and 5g. If the property is acquired, public access will be granted on and through the property and onto neighboring National Forest land. It is estimated that this will be a relatively high use area for elk, deer, turkey and upland game bird hunters, and ensuing increased harvest is possible. The acquisition of this property will not negatively impact species populations in the general area; rather it will better improve MFWP's objectives of managing game species through public hunting. As in other areas (public and private), illegal activities (i.e., poaching) are a possibility. Area game wardens will patrol the area in conjunction with other enforcement activities to enforce game laws and minimize illegal activity on the parcel and neighboring USFS.

5f. Upon searching the Montana Natural Heritage Program's species of concern database, 2 species of concern (Hoary Bat, *Lasiurus cinereus* and Westslope Cutthroat Trout, *Oncorhynchus clarkia lewisi*) were found with overlapping potential distribution within the property boundaries. However, no observations of these species have been made within the property boundaries, not will management and recreational activities on the property effect either of these species (August 23, 2013).

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X			6a
b. Exposure of people to severe or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other		X				

6a. The proposed action involves a transfer of ownership of property, improvement of a parking area, construction of a trail and perimeter fence, and signing the property and access point. Future management actions would be evaluated in separate analyses. Construction equipment during the development of a parking area could cause a temporary, minor increase in noise levels at the project site. Any such increase in noise levels would be short term and minor. Visitor use could also cause a minor increase in noise levels.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

7. LAND USE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				7a
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?		X				
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other		X				

7a. The proposed action involves a transfer of ownership of property, improvement of a parking area, construction of a trail and perimeter fence, and signing the property and access point. Future management actions would be evaluated in separate analyses.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

8. RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?		X				8a
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?		X				8c
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used (see also 8a)?		NA				
e. Other		X				

8a and 8c. The proposed action involves a transfer of ownership of property, improvement of a parking area, construction of a trail and perimeter fence, and signing the property and access point. Future management actions would be evaluated in separate analyses. If the property were acquired by MFWP, the department would manage weeds in accordance with the Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan, which would include using biological, mechanical and herbicidal treatments to control noxious weeds; the use of herbicides would be in compliance with application guidelines and applied by people trained in safe handling techniques.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

9. COMMUNITY IMPACT Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density or growth of the human population of an area?		X				9a
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increase traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				
f. Other		X				9f

9f. The proposed action is expected to have a positive impact to the Lewistown community and central Montana residents by acquiring a public recreation site and improving public access to public land.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

10. PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. An effect upon or result in a need for new or altered government services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify.		X				10a
b. An effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				10b
c. A need for new facilities or substantial alteration of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Increased use of any energy source?		X				
e. Define projected revenue sources?		X				
f. Define projected maintenance costs		X				10f
g. Other		X				

10b. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks pays taxes "in a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment were it taxable to a private citizen." (MCA 87-1-603). Therefore, there will be no negative impact of this action on the local tax base. Property taxes for 2012 totaled $20.80.

10f. Maintenance costs are expected to be limited to weed control on the property after initial construction (parking area/signage) are completed. MFWP would expect other maintenance costs to be limited to signing, fencing and minor user trail maintenance.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				11a
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?		X				
c. Alteration of the quality of quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings?			X			11c
d. For P-R/D-J, will nay designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (also see 11a, 11c)		NA				
e. Other		X				

11a. The elements of the proposed project will require the construction of a parking area, trail, and perimeter fence, all of which will require the removal or disturbance of a limited amount of ground vegetation. The disturbed areas would be visible to the public but the improvement would not diminish the aesthetic values of the overall property and viewscape.

11c. The proposed acquisition would increase the quantity and quality of access to recreation in the Big Snowy Mountains/Lewis and Clark National Forest. Given there are other access points to the south, MFWP does not anticipate a significant increase in public use to central Montana at the level that would require a tourism report to quantify.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric, historic, or paleontological importance?		X				12a
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred used of a site or area?		X				
d. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (see also 12a)		NA				12d
e. Other		X				

12d. There are no cultural/historic resources of significance that would be impacted by this acquisition and ensuing management.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT				Can Impact be Mitigated	Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources which create a significant effect when considered together or in total)		X				13a
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?		X				
f. For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (see also 13e)		NA				
g. For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		NA				
h. Other		X				

13a. There were no impacts identified in this analysis that would be individually or cumulatively significant. The acquisition of the Red Hill Road – East Fork Access Property by MFWP would not have a significant impact on the social, economic, environmental, cultural, or community resources in the Lewistown area.