

**Montana Department
of
Fish, Wildlife & Parks**



Enclosed are copies of the Environmental Assessment, Management Plan and Socio-Economic Assessment for the proposed wildlife habitat purchase known as **The Gun Club acquisition**. Your comments would be appreciated. This is part of a 30-day public comment period during which a public hearing will be held in Anaconda. Copies of these documents have been seen to various interest groups, government agencies, adjacent landowners, and interested individuals.

Comment Period = Oct 1 through Oct 30.

Public Hearing = Metcalf Center
Anaconda
Oct. 27, 7:00 PM.

Send written comments to = Dept FWP
3201 Spurgin Rd.
Missoula, Mt. 59801

Contact Person = Dan Hook, Biologist
563-5612
dhookfwp@aol.com

Written and recorded statements at the public hearing will be incorporated in the document and present to the Fish Wildlife and Parks Commission for their review and consideration in this proposal.

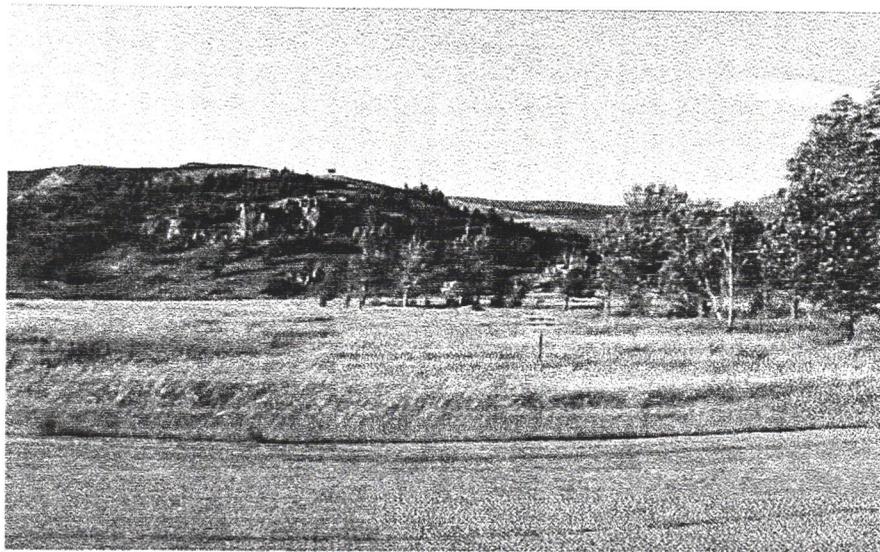
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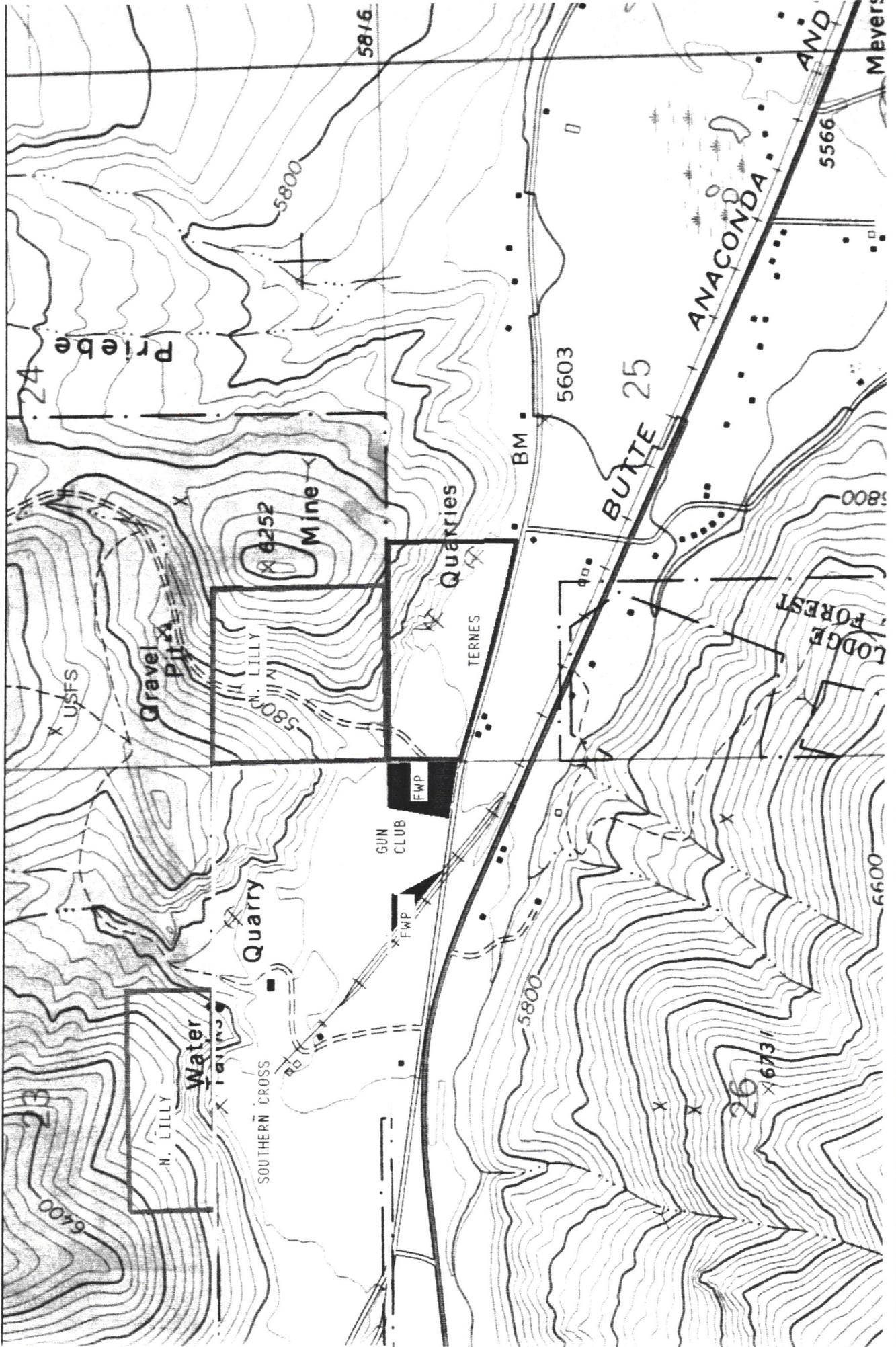
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GUN CLUB

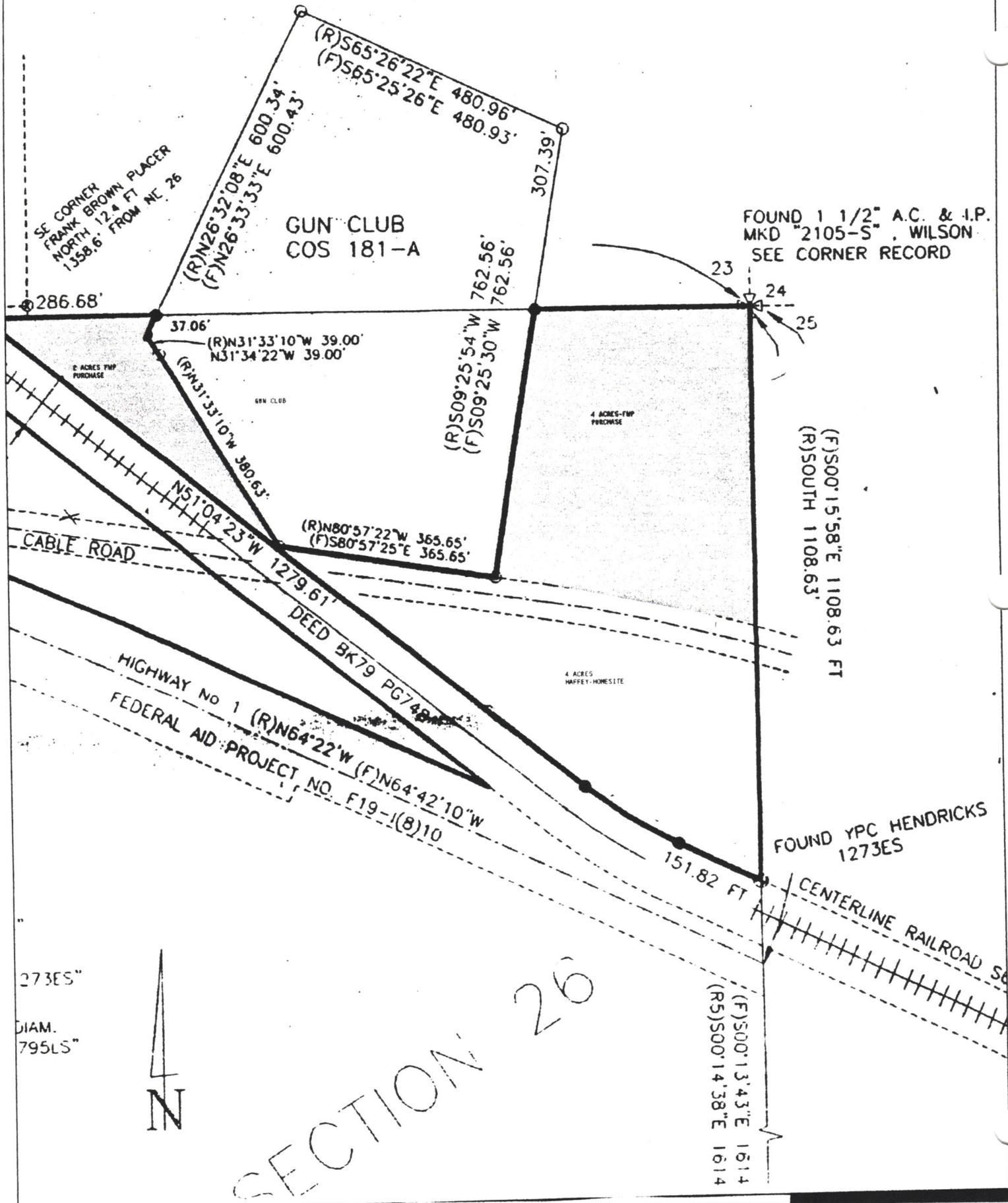
Environmental Assessment
Management Plan
Socio-Economic Assessment

- HABITAT
PROJECT
- R2
- BIGHORN
SHEEP





RETRACEMENT AND BOUNDARY SURVEY OF AN EXISTING TRACT,
 EXEMPTION, PROJECT No. F19-I(8)10, PURSUANT TO 76-3-209
 (c).ARM.



**Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Wildlife Division**

Environmental Assessment

Gun Club Property

I. Introduction

The State of Montana has recognized that certain native plant communities are worth perpetual conservation for wildlife habitat. Those include riparian, sagebrush-grassland and intermountain grassland. The proposed purchase of 6.27 acres from Audrey Haffey would add critical bighorn sheep winter range to Lost Creek Bighorn sheep herd.

The site consists of grassland habitat in the Warm Springs Creek drainage.

A majority (100+) of the Lost Creek sheep herd will utilize this area during extreme winter weather conditions and during early spring green up.

II. Authority and Direction

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has the authority under law (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. Revenue generated from the auction sale of one Bighorn sheep permit a year is earmarked for bighorn sheep management and habitat acquisition and will be the source of funding for this acquisition. The Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Commission must approve any acquisition of land. This Environmental assessment is part of the decision making process.

III. Location of Project

The Gun Club property proposed for acquisition is 6.27 acres located 4 miles west of Anaconda (Figure 1). The property is in two parcels east and west of the Anaconda Rifle and Pistol Club in the NE corner of Section 26, T5N, R 12W. The property is bordered on the south by Cable Road and on the northwest by property owned by Southern Cross Mining. The eastern neighbor is Wayne Ternes.

IV. Purpose and Need For The Purposed Action

The Lost Creek bighorn sheep herd is a significant resource in this area. The Lost Creek land exchange immediately to the north has recently added over 12,000 acres of bighorn habitat to public ownership (USFS). The Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has acquired 1400 acres of bighorn habitat in the Lost Creek WMA since 1994. The proposed purchase along with additional conservation easements and purchases being negotiated would protect some of the remaining critical winter range by placing it in public ownership.

V. Description of Proposed Action

The proposed action is for FWP to purchase 6.27 acres from Audrey Haffey. The cost will be \$18,000. Mrs. Haffey has recently acquired a tract of 10.29 acres from RY Timber. She proposed to do a minor subdivision and divide the tract into 3 parcels, one south of Cable Road and two north of Cable Road-separated by the Anaconda Rifle and Pistol Club property. She requested a change in zoning from agricultural to residential. The property north of Cable Road is critical bighorn habitat. It is used by a majority of the herd during periods of extreme winter conditions and during early spring green up. The proposed zoning change resulted in considerable local debate and confrontation. Mrs. Haffey agreed to sell FWP the 6.27 acres north of Cable Road as a public compromise.

VI. Description of Reasonable Alternatives To The Proposed Action

1. No Action Alternative

The "No Action" alternative would not protect the wildlife habitat values of this property in perpetuity. The property would remain in Mrs. Haffey's possession. She may chose to sell the property or lease it for agricultural use i.e. grazing, or chose to pursue rezoning for residential use.

2. Conservation Easement

This alternative was rejected because it did not meet the needs or desires of the owner.

3. Lease Alternative

This alternative was rejected because it did not meet the needs or desires of the owner.

VII. Evaluation Of Impacts On The Physical Environment

1. Land Resources

Impact of Proposed Action: No negative impact would occur as a result of this proposal. The proposal would ensure that the productivity of the land would be maintained.

No Action Alternative: Development of the property would have significant impacts on the winter range values. Use of the property for livestock grazing would reduce forage availability for Bighorns and produce game damage conflicts. The introduction of domestic sheep would have dire consequences for the Lost Creek bighorn herd. This herd suffered a serious die-off in 1991 due to a pneumonia outbreak. Domestic sheep are often associated with pneumonia epidemics in bighorns.

2. Air Resources

Impact of Proposed Action: There would be no impact.

No Action Alternative: There would be no immediate impact.

3. Water Resources

Impact of Proposed Action: There would be no impact.

No Action Alternative: There are no open water resources on the property.

4. Vegetation

Impact of Proposed Action: This action would result in a positive impact. Native grasslands would be preserved. This property would be managed as big game winter range. Noxious weed management will occur.

No Action Alternative: If the land use were to change from agricultural to residential there would be no conservation measures to maintain the productivity of the land. If the property remained agricultural, impacts to vegetation would depend on the degree and extent of livestock grazing. Currently, there is no domestic livestock use of the property.

5. Fish/Wildlife

Impact of Proposed Action: This action would result in a positive impact. The property will continue to provide critical bighorn sheep habitat. No adverse effects are expected on the diversity or abundance of game species, non-game species or threatened and endangered species. There would be no introduction of non-native species in the area.

No Action Alternative: If the property were subdivided and developed there would be significant impacts, particularly, to the wintering bighorns. The physical lose of habitat would be significant but the increase in human activity and resulting disturbance and displacement of animals on their winter range could have greater consequences. The introduction of domestic livestock for pasture would increase forage competition with and displace the bighorns. Introduction of domestic sheep would have dire consequences.

VIII. Evaluation Of Impacts On The Human Environment

1. Noise/Electrical Effects

Impact of Proposed Action: There would be no impact.

No Action Alternative: This would allow for more possibilities for increased noise levels and electrical transmissions with an increase in human activity.

2. Land Use

Impact of Proposed Action: There would be no change in existing land use. The property would continue to provide wildlife habitat and public access and recreation.

No Action Alternative: Changes would likely occur in land use practices, habitat quality, current wildlife use and numbers and public recreational opportunity.

3. Risk/Health Hazards

Impact of Proposed Action: There would be no impact.

No Action Alternative: There would be no impact.

4. Community Impacts

Impact of Proposed Action: There would be no anticipated negative impacts to the community. The scenic values and open nature of the property would be maintained and enjoyed by the community in perpetuity. See-attached Social-Economic Assessment.

No Action Alternative: This alternative could result in loss of open lands.

5. Public Services/Taxes/Utilities

Impact of Proposed Action: The proposed action would not affect local or state tax bases or revenues, nor existing utility systems and energy consumption. FWP will pay in lieu of taxes to Deerlodge County.

No Action Alternative: This alternative could allow increased residential subdivision in the future if current zoning is changed. Subsequent development could alter tax bases, increase traffic on roads and expand needs for utilities and other services.

6. Aesthetics/Recreation

Impact of Proposed Action: The proposed action would perpetuate the existing aesthetic and recreational qualities of the property. It would maintain public recreational opportunities into the future.

No Action Alternative: Potential subdivision or increased agricultural use could reduce the aesthetic and recreational quality of the area.

7. Cultural/Historic

Impact of Proposed Action: There would be no impact.

No Action Alternative: There would be no impact.

8. Social/Economic Assessment

Please refer to the Attached Socio-economic Assessment for Additional analysis of impacts to the human environment.

IX. Evaluation of Significance

The proposed action should have no cumulative negative effect. However, there would be positive cumulative affects for wildlife, recreation and open space.

X. Evaluation For Need For an EIS

Based on the above assessment, which has not identified any significant negative impacts from the proposed action, an EIS is not required and an EA is the appropriate level of review. The over-all impact from the successful completion of the proposed action would provide long-term benefits to both the physical and human environment.

XI. Public Involvement

A public hearing will be conducted on Oct. 27th, 1999; Metcalf Center, Anaconda.

The public comment period will begin Oct.1 1999 through Oct. 30, 1999.

Comments on this proposal should be addressed to:

Dept FWP
Spurgin Rd
Missoula, Mt. 59801

Contact person: Dan Hook
563-5612
dhookfwp@aol.com

**GUN CLUB
DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN
SEPT. 22, 1999**

INTRODUCTION:

The Gun Club acquisition would involve 6.27 acres north of Cable Road in Section 26, T 5 N, R 12 W. It is the first of a series of proposed acquisitions and easements in the area designed to protect and maintain bighorn sheep winter range in the west valley of Anaconda. These acquisitions and easements would adjoin 12,000 acres recently acquired by the US Forest Service through the Lost Creek land exchange.

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

Area Description:

The Gun Club property is 6.27 acres located north of Cable Road approximately 4 miles west of Anaconda (Figure 1). The property is open grassland in the Warm Springs Creek valley at 5267 feet elevation. A small grove of cottonwoods occurs around an old homesite. The site is physically divided into 2 parcels of approximately 2 and 4 acres with the Anaconda Gun Club (in the middle. Southern Cross L.L.C. borders the property on the north and west, on the east by Wayne Ternes, and the south by Audrey Haffey.

Goal:

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

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

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

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

Problem 2: Boundary fences are incomplete.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Objective 3: Provide for public hunting and recreation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

MONITORING:

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

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

Population: Numbers of Bighorn sheep will be monitored annually by ground and aircraft. Seasonal use will be monitored during periods of extreme weather conditions and spring green up.

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

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS

GUN CLUB PROPERTY

FEE TITLE PURCHASE

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

**Prepared by:
Rob Brooks
September, 1999**

I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature (MCA 87-1-241 and MCA 87-1-242), authorizes Montana Fish, Wildlife and 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 purchase of land presently owned by Audrey B. Haffey. The report addresses the physical and institutional setting as well as the social and economic impacts associated with the proposed fee title purchase.

II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

A. Property Description

The Gun Club property is located about 4 miles from Anaconda, Mt. on either side of the gun club. This fee title purchase encompasses approximately 6.3 acres. A detailed description of this property is included on page two of the environmental assessment (EA)

B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations

The habitat is native grassland and is used extensively by bighorn sheep during the winter and spring months. The habitat also supports other game and nongame species.

C. Current Use

There is currently no livestock or crop use on this property. The owners have proposed a minor subdivision for these two parcels.

D. Management Alternatives

- 1) Fee title purchase of the subject property by MFWP
- 2) No purchase

Alternative 1, fee title purchase of the property will protect the integrity of this area. The subject property is critical sheep winter range during extreme years and is an important component of the overall plan to protect sheep winter range in the Lost Creek drainage through fee title and conservation easement purchases.

Alternative 2, the no purchase option, leaves this land at risk in terms of preserving its wildlife habitat and winter range values. If MFWP does not purchase the subject property the possibility of subdivision becomes a real threat given the location and access of the property.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Section II identified the management alternatives this report addresses. Fee title purchase will provide long term protection of important wildlife habitat and bighorn sheep winter range, help to preserve the open space characteristics and integrity of the area and provide for public access. Section III quantifies the social and economic consequences of the two management alternatives following two basic accounting stances: financial and local area impacts.

Financial impacts address the cost of the fee title purchase 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 have on local businesses (i.e. income and employment).

A. Financial Impacts

The financial impacts on MFWP are related to the fee title purchase price and the maintenance/management costs. The Gun Club property will cost MFWP \$18,000. Maintenance/management costs related to the purchase are associated with weed control, fencing, etc.

The financial impacts to local governments are the potential changes in tax revenues resulting from the fee title purchase. MCA 87-1-603 states that “the treasurer of each county in which the department owns any land shall describe the land, state the number of acres in each parcel, and request the drawing of a warrant to the 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.” There will be no significant changes in tax revenues to local governments including schools due to the purchase of this land by MFWP.

B. Economic Impacts

There will be no economic impacts to local businesses associated with this purchase related to crop or livestock production. There may be some positive economic impacts associated with wildlife viewing opportunities in the future.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

As noted at the beginning of this document, the Gun Club property is located in Anaconda-Deer Lodge County near the town of Anaconda, Mt.

This fee title purchase will provide protection for critical winter habitat for bighorn sheep that utilize this area. The purchase will remove the concern about subdivision thereby preserving the integrity of the area as well as provide for public access.

The fee title purchase by MFWP of the subject property will not have a significant affect on tax revenues collected by Anaconda-Deer Lodge County on these acres from their current levels.

The impact to local businesses will be minimal since there is no crop or livestock activities on these acres. There may be some positive economic activity related to wildlife viewing related to the wintering bighorn sheep.