Bull River Wildlife Management Area
Noggle Creek Addition

Land Owner: Plum Creek Timber Company
Lincoln and Sanders Counties, Montana

Prepared by:
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
August 2007

<u>Region One Habitat Montana</u>

<u>Proposed Land Project</u>

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1. PROPOSED LAND PROJECT

Date: August 10, 2007
Property Name: Noggle Creek Addition to Bull River WMA
Location: Region One, Lincoln & Sanders Counties (T28N, R33W, West ½ of Section 3)
Landownership: Currently owned by Plum Creek Timber Company (Figure 1)
Public Review Period: August 10 through September 7, 2007
Public Hearing: Wednesday, September 5, 2007, at 6:00 p.m., Kootenai Senior Citizens Center, 304 Third Street, Troy, Montana
Contact person: FWP R-1 Wildlife Manager Jim Williams, (406) 751-4585 or e-mail to jiwilliams@mt.gov

2. INTRODUCTIONS & PROPOSED ACTION

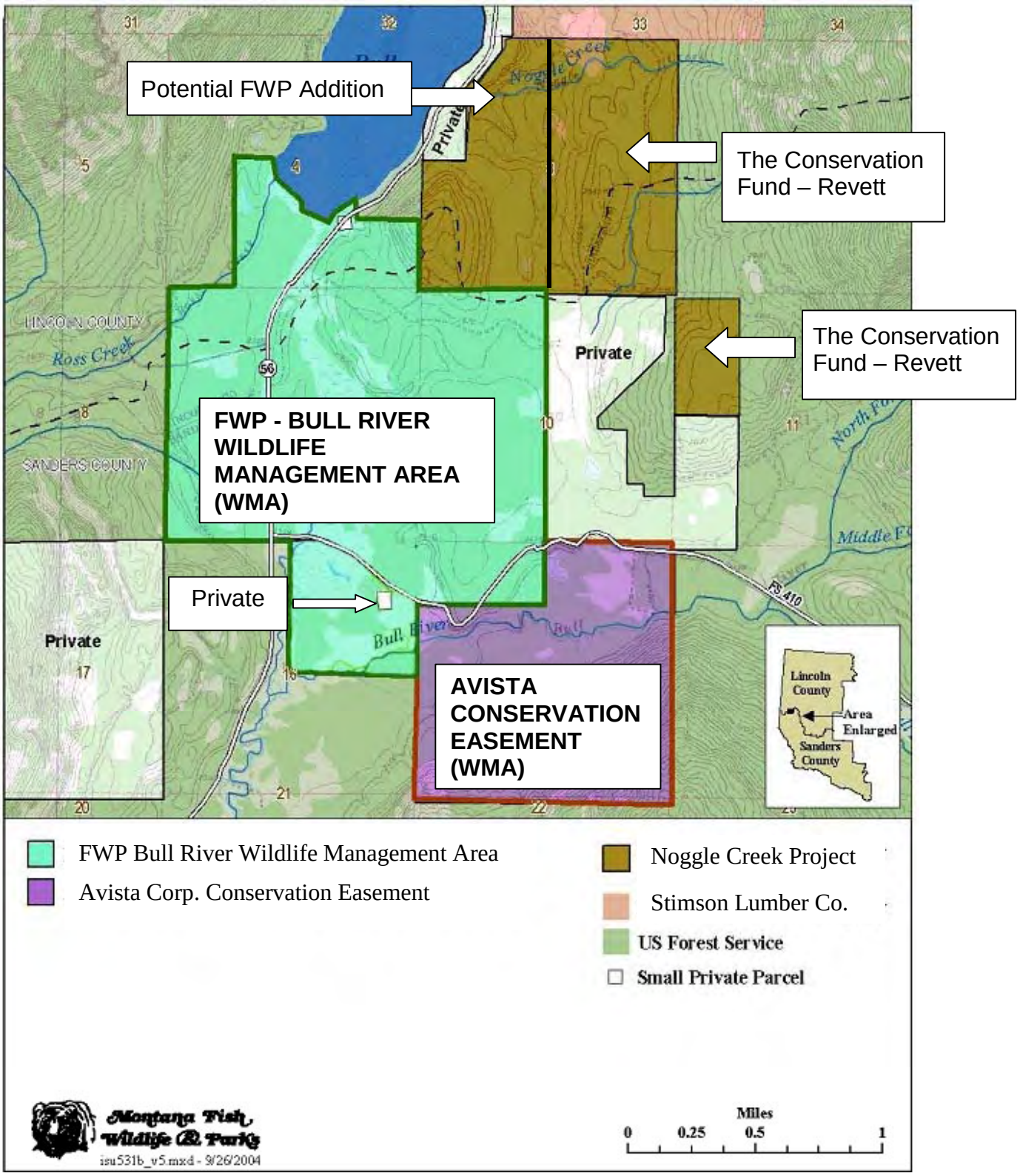
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, using Habitat Montana funds, would acquire approximately 255 acres of important wildlife habitat for $1,657,500. The FWP acquisition represents an addition to the existing Bull River Wildlife Management Area. An additional 400 acres directly adjacent to this project will be purchased by The Conservation Fund of Arlington, Virginia, and RC Resources, Inc., of Spokane, Washington (Revett Minerals).

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes to acquire 255 acres of the Noggle Creek project to meet the following needs:

- To maintain the integrity of the existing Bull River WMA for a variety of habitat and wildlife values, particularly for grizzly bears and elk;
- To maintain a corridor of connectivity that allows grizzly bears, lynx, gray wolves, and other wide-ranging wildlife to travel between the East and West Cabinet Mountains;
- To prevent residential subdivision of important winter range for elk, moose, and deer;
- To prevent residential subdivision of early spring range for black bears and grizzly bears; and
- To provide public access to these lands for compatible recreational use.

The 255-acre Noggle Creek project (Figure 1) lies directly north of our Bull River WMA and was identified as an integral parcel for acquisition during initial negotiations for the WMA in 2004. Section 3 has a major knoll near its southern border that is important for elk and moose. It has about 20 acres of wetlands associated with Noggle Creek. The forested bench land that surrounds these features is part of the natural travel corridor along the divide between the Lake Creek and Bull River drainages and East and West Cabinets. This area is especially important for grizzly bears and other large carnivores and big game species that move between the East and West Cabinet Mountains.

Figure 1. Bull River WMA, Avista Conservation Easement lands, and proposed Noggle Creek Acquistion area.



3. Summary:

a. Habitat Types:

The Noggle Creek property consists primarily of montane forest habitats with a unique diversity of mixed conifers ranging from western red cedar to ponderosa pine. About 20 acres of riparian and wetland habitats with intact mature forest buffers are represented along Noggle Creek.

Figure 2. The forested bench land on the property is part of the natural travel corridor along the divide between Lake Creek and Bull River and East and West Cabinets.

b. Resource Values:

These lands are highly productive with significant annual growth of native plants; most of the forest stands on this land were harvested 20-30 years ago and are presently growing into a diverse second growth forest 20-30 feet tall. The riparian areas have mature forest and riparian shrub buffers. The area has not been grazed by domestic animals. Although these habitat types are not particularly rare, the actual location of this land along the hydrologic divide between two major drainages is one of this property's most important characteristics. The project lands provide habitat for grizzly bears, Canada lynx, and gray wolf, all of which are federally listed. Conservation of the project lands will secure a protected travel corridor linking the East and West Cabinet Mountains for these three wide-ranging mammals, as well as for fisher, moose, elk, deer, and other species. As an addition to the existing Bull River WMA, the project will also conserve winter range for 100-150 elk. The rolling topography with a noticeable isolated knob (see below) just north of the WMA provides important winter habitat for big game, particularly elk. Elk also use the bottomlands and the uplands for calving in the spring.

This entire 655-acre project makes up the most important remaining unprotected pieces of this key linkage area not currently in conservation status.

Figure 3. View of WMA wetlands in foreground and Noggle Creek knob and bench lands north of FWP's existing WMA. East Cabinet Mountains in the background.

c. Threat Status:

Imminent: The Noggle Creek property received preliminary approval for residential subdivision from Lincoln and Sanders Counties. Road construction and utility work were scheduled to begin in June of 2007.

Degree of Protection: This project area lies adjacent to the Bull River WMA, which adjoins Forest Service lands to the east and west; there is a small Forest Service tract along the west boundary of Section 3 and on three sides of the 80-acre tract in Section 11 (Figure 1).

Geographic Location/Size: The entire Noggle Creek project consists of approximately 655 acres, is immediately adjacent to the existing Bull River WMA, and lies mostly along its north boundary. FWP is proposing to acquire 255 acres of important wildlife habitat as part of this overall conservation effort (T28N, R33W, S3, W ½).

Due to risk and high habitat values, this project is FWP's highest priority for habitat conservation in northwest Montana. In addition, this parcel is a high priority for off-site replacement habitat as part of the mitigation plan for the Revett Rock Creek Mine project. Revett Minerals has agreed to help with the conservation of this 655-acre parcel for potential future mitigation if the mine gets approved.

d. Wildlife Values:

Grizzly Bears: Listed by the USFWS as warranted for endangered status, grizzly bears use the project area for spring and fall foraging habitat. The project area is significant to grizzly bear recovery as one of two primary travel corridors between the East and West Cabinet Mountains. This area is identified as a grizzly bear linkage zone, which is defined as an area connecting a large block of generally undeveloped habitat where grizzlies can find food, shelter, and security. Linkage zones maintain connectivity for gene flow between small, isolated populations and

thereby decrease the probability of extinction. The linkage zone in the project area is considered important to maintaining grizzly bear movement between the Cabinet-Yaak ecosystem and the endangered grizzly bear population in the Selkirk Mountains of northern Idaho. The opportunity for population connection/exchange is particularly vital in this region due to the low numbers of remaining bears left in both the Selkirk and Cabinet-Yaak ecosystems. A total of about 15 grizzly bears are estimated to inhabit the East and West Cabinet Mountains (W. Kasworm, USFWS, personal communication).

Figure 4. Jerry Brown and Tom Radandt assisting with relocation of a young female grizzly as part of the population augmentation program for the Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone.

In recent years, radio-collared grizzlies have been located in the North, Middle, and South Forks of the Bull River to the east of the project area. Grizzlies are also known to inhabit Ross Creek, Spar Lake, and Dry Creek near the project area to the west, and one recently transplanted grizzly bear was documented crossing the Bull River Valley via the Bull River WMA on two occasions. The project area falls within the USFWS Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone, and all surrounding public lands (Kootenai National Forest) have the highest possible ranking (MS-1) for areas that contain habitat components needed for survival and recovery of grizzly bears. Human-caused mortality is the single largest threat to recovery of grizzly bears in this small recovery zone. This is the main reason federal status of grizzlies was changed from “threatened” to “warranted for endangered” for this population. Overall, the proposed land acquisition addresses the goals of both the USFWS recovery plan and the Kootenai National Forest Plan to conserve grizzly bear habitat and linkage areas.

Gray Wolf: The gray wolf is listed as endangered in the project area; conserving habitats and linkage areas are important for recovery. Recent gray wolf sightings have been reported in the Lower Clark Fork, East Fork Bull River, and Spar Lake

areas. In 2002 a wolf was killed by a vehicle on Highway 56 in the vicinity of the Dors Skeels campground about four miles from the project area. The large numbers of wintering deer, elk, and resident moose that use this property, and the property's location on a watershed divide between two major mountain ranges, make this project area highly suitable for use by wolves and other predators. It serves as a significant travel route for wildlife moving between the East and West Cabinet Mountains. It is also part of a key link between the Montana Cabinets and the Idaho Selkirks.

Lynx: The Canada lynx, also federally listed as threatened, is a wide-ranging species that depends on forest habitats in northwest Montana. Lynx occur in both the East and West Cabinet Mountains (J. Brown, FWP, personal communication). University of Montana staff tracked a radio-collared lynx from the Fishtrap Creek drainage in the Thompson River north through the Cabinet Mountains into the upper Yaak. Recent studies in northwest Montana and Canada also documented lynx making seasonal forays to lower elevations, suggesting that they also may use this forested low-elevation watershed divide between the East and West Cabinet Mountains.

Fisher: The upper Bull River and nearby Ross Creek were the key locations used by FWP in the 1990s for reintroduction of fisher, a native member of the weasel family that had apparently been extirpated from the area. The project lands contain high-quality forested wetland habitats preferred by fisher. In 2002, a family of fisher was captured along Bull Lake, a few miles north of the project area. More recent radio telemetry research shows that fisher have used the proposed project lands.

Wolverine: Wolverine are known to occur in both the East and West Cabinet Mountains. A recent observation was reported at Snake Creek Pass, just a few miles southeast of the project area at the head of the South Fork Bull River. Based on observation data and results of other studies of this wide-ranging species, wolverine are considered likely to visit the project area during winter looking for carrion associated with wintering elk and deer. Wolverine are also likely to select the watershed divide as a travel corridor between major mountain ranges.

Big Game: The proposed project area includes important year-round range for white-tailed deer, mule deer, elk, and moose, and has particular importance as elk and moose winter range. FWP has counted up to 150 elk wintering on the project area. Mountain lions and black bears also use the project area. Black bears use the wetlands and low elevations in the spring and are likely to travel through these lands as they move across the valley and go to higher elevations. The abundance of game throughout the year is likely to attract mountain lions.

e. **Access and Recreation:** The 255 acres proposed for acquisition by FWP would be incorporated into the Bull River WMA, which is open to the public for hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, hiking, horseback riding, and other nonmotorized day uses compatible with habitat conservation and wildlife security. Walk-in access will be provided from a small parking area developed along Highway 56 and from pullouts on the two county roads. The wildlife management area is closed to public use from December through mid-May to provide for winter wildlife security. Under Plum

Creek's ownership, these lands have always been open to public use under Plum Creek's Open Lands Policy. However, if sold for development, they would be closed to general public recreation.

Figure 5. View of the East Cabinet Mountains reflected in the wetlands on the Bull River Wildlife Management Area.

f. **Special Values and Urgency:** FWP, Avista Corporation, The Conservation Fund, and local interest groups recognized the ecological value of this area and worked with Plum Creek to create the Bull River WMA in 2004. We are fortunate to have Plum Creek once again working cooperatively with FWP and its partners to potentially secure the rest of this key area.

g. **Maintain Local Tax Base:** The Noggle Creek land acquisition would have minimal impact on property tax revenue to the counties. For lands owned in fee title, FWP makes annual payments to the counties equal to the annual property taxes assessed on equivalent private property. A complete economic analysis that includes local tax base issues is included in Appendix B.

h. **Wildlife Objectives:** The wildlife objectives for these lands, if acquired, would be for the benefit of fish and wildlife, and winter range values consistent with the objectives of the existing Bull River WMA and the associated conservation easement on Avista's land. A management plan for the Bull River WMA is complete (Appendix A) and was part of the draft EA for acquisition of the initial Plum Creek lands and the Avista conservation easement. In addition to managing

these lands for wildlife, they would be managed to restore and maintain a diverse forest ecosystem, enhance or maintain winter range values, and enhance or maintain wetlands and riparian areas. If the property were to be subdivided and developed, there would be an increase in game damage complaints, increased disturbances associated with homes, roads, pets, and other human activities, reduced security for wintering wildlife, possibly increased trespass issues on the existing WMA, and likely loss of overall habitat values.

i. **Current Habitat Condition:** The mature forest buffer along Noggle Creek is in good condition; the rest of the forest is healthy and growing extremely well since it was harvested 20-30 years ago. The shrub layer has responded well and is providing abundant willow, dogwood, serviceberry, and other forage species for ungulates. These lands would need to be surveyed for weeds; some small weed problems were found on the original land purchases for the Bull River WMA and would likely exist along roads in the proposed project area. In time, the forest could be managed to provide both thermal cover and habitat for a variety of wildlife species.

Figure 6. Jerry Brown, FWP Wildlife Biologist in Libby, walks through shrubfields and young forest stands on the proposed Noggle Creek acquisition, summer 2007.

j. **Existing Wildlife Data:** The Bull River WMA and the Noggle Creek property currently winter 100-150 elk, 10-15 moose, and numerous white-tailed deer. White-tailed deer are also abundant year-round. Mountain lions frequent the area due to the abundant prey base, and black bears are common on the property during spring and summer months. A 1-week survey completed by FWP in 2006 documented 77 wildlife species using 9 major habitats on the WMA (See Appendix C).

k. **Game Damage, Management, and Manpower Needs:** Acquisition of this property will likely decrease potential game damage situations and could actually decrease future manpower needs because it would reduce the number of residents along the WMA border. Potential problems and increases in manpower are greater with increases in the number of houses and neighbors bordering a WMA. Problems that could increase following development include cutting and removing the WMA boundary fences, use of the WMA during closed periods, creation of unauthorized gates for personal access, dogs chasing wildlife on the WMA, construction of buildings or parking on the WMA, and weeds spreading onto the WMA from adjacent private lands.

   The proposed acquisition of 255 acres of Plum Creek lands in Section 3 would not add significant management costs to the 1,330 acres in the WMA today. The Avista Corporation is providing funding for FWP's management of the existing Bull River WMA as a result of the Clark Fork Settlement Agreement associated with relicensing of Cabinet Gorge and Noxon Rapids Dams. For most management costs, FWP submits an annual request to Avista Corporation. Management costs on these newly added lands will be funded by FWP. Initial costs for the Bull River WMA were approximately $24,000. Annual costs are expected to be around $4,000-$5,000 each year. The addition of 255 acres could increase this cost by about 10%.

l. **How Many Hunter/Angler Recreation Days?** Wildlife management staff note that hunting use of the existing Bull River WMA increases significantly the last few weeks of the general season as the elk move down. They estimate the WMA alone generates 150-200 hunter days each year. The number of hunter days on the WMA would likely increase by 10-25% if the additional Plum Creek lands are added to the WMA or conserved as public lands.

m. **Provide Incentives for Habitat Conservation on Private Land:** FWP's acquisition of 255 acres would not be possible without the simultaneous purchase of the other 400 acres by The Conservation Fund and Revett Minerals since Plum Creek was not willing to sell half of Noggle Creek to FWP and develop the other half. Thus, participation of our partners is critical to our acquisition. There are many other conservation efforts active in this area. As mentioned earlier, private landowners in the Bull River Valley have completed several conservation easements with various organizations including Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Nature Conservancy, and the Montana Land Reliance. The Forest Service completed a land exchange along Bull Lake to the west to help conserve the habitat values of Bull Lake. In addition, Avista has purchased lands and is working with other private landowners in the upper Bull River Valley to complete more conservation with recently approved North American Wetlands Conservation Act funding. These conserved lands are all within 20 miles of the existing Bull River WMA.

n. **Management Implications of Not Funding Project:** Because the project area has received preliminary approval for subdivision, the land will likely be sold and developed into homes and recreation property if not secured as an addition to the WMA. Development would impact existing and future wildlife habitat values of the property, compromising important habitat for grizzly bears and other terrestrial

species. Private development would also likely preclude public access to the property for recreational uses, and may prevent public access to adjacent National Forest lands. The property owner has received preliminary approval to subdivide the property into 25 single-family lots. That many new, private residences adjacent to the existing Bull River WMA would increase management costs of the WMA and reduce the capacity of the Noggle Creek property to support wintering ungulates as well as other wildlife inhabiting the area. In addition, the value of these lands as travel or migration corridors for grizzly bears, ungulates, and carnivores could be dramatically reduced. The effect of development could be the creation of a habitat sink rather than a habitat source for wildlife.

o. **Management Plan:** The Management Plan for Bull River WMA is contained in Attachment A and emphasizes maintaining the area for the key wildlife species listed above, for connectivity, and for recreational opportunities consistent with these goals. Some of the management costs for the WMA are funded through Avista Corporation, who helped FWP acquire these lands for fish and wildlife purposes. FWP will pay future management costs of the proposed Noggle Creek addition.

Figure 7. Winter on the Bull River Wildlife Management Area.

4. ALTERNATIVES

THE PROPOSED ACTION

FWP proposes to undertake and complete the conservation project, comprising the purchase of 255 acres in fee as described in this draft EA. The project would secure important habitat for wide-ranging wildlife, including grizzly bears, lynx, wolf, moose, elk, and other species dependent on the wetlands and uplands of the property. The project would also ensure continuation of public access to the project area for compatible recreational uses.

NO-ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the no-action alternative, FWP would not pursue the conservation project and would forego the opportunity to purchase the 255-acre project area. The property owner has received preliminary approval to subdivide the property into 25 single-family lots.

ACTIONS CONSIDERED BUT NOT EVALUATED AS POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES

An alternative method to achieve habitat conservation for the project area would be for FWP to purchase a conservation easement on that property, rather than pursuing direct fee ownership. However, the property owner is not interested in selling a conservation easement. FWP only works with a “willing seller”; therefore, the alternative of acquiring a conservation easement on the property is not viable and is not further considered in this draft EA. Also to be considered is the fact that the value of the Avista conservation easement south of the WMA was about 90% of the cost of full fee ownership.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

This section of the draft EA evaluates the impacts of the proposed action and the no-action alternative on the physical, biological, and human environment.

PHYSICAL AND BIOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT

Land Resources

Proposed Action: Under the proposed action, land resources within the project area would be protected and managed for fish and wildlife habitat values. This would maintain or improve existing land resources.

No-Action Alternative: Under the no-action alternative, the 255-acre project parcel would be subdivided and subject to private homesite development. Such development could impact the wetland, riparian, and forest resources through clearing of land, construction of buildings and roads, planting of nonnative vegetation, and disturbance of sensitive areas, including wetlands, riparian zones, and big game winter range.

Air Quality

Proposed Action: In general, under the proposed action, air quality would be maintained or improved by managing vegetative growth for fish and wildlife habitat. If future land management actions for forest or wetland restoration required burning, FWP would abide by state air quality regulations.

No-Action Alternative: No action on the project parcel would allow for land uses that could have negative impacts to air quality, such as burning from residential wood stoves, timber slash, road dust, or other activities.

Water Resources

Proposed Action: Under the proposed action, water quality would be maintained or improved by protecting wetlands, riparian areas, and existing water resources. Wetlands and healthy riparian areas serve as natural filters protecting water quality. In addition, wetlands can protect water quantity in streams by storing water and releasing it over a longer period of time than would occur with surface run-off. Healthy riparian areas provide stream shading, which lowers water temperatures. The proposed action would also protect the Noggle Creek channels, banks, and riparian vegetation, promoting channel stability.

No-Action Alternative: If developed, the quality and quantity of wetland and water resources may not be maintained. Subdivision and development of the project parcel could result in reduced wetlands and riparian vegetation resulting in increased erosion, decreased stream shading, decreased channel stability, and increased sedimentation of aquatic habitat threatening water quality and aquatic resources.

Vegetation

Proposed Action: The proposed action would maintain or improve existing quantity, quality, and diversity of native vegetation, and a program would be in place to reduce the spread of noxious weeds. Forested uplands would be managed primarily for wildlife values as identified in the proposed management plan.

No-Action Alternative: On the project land, subdivision and development would likely reduce and change native plant communities. There could also be an increase in noxious weeds due to land use changes. In addition, changes to vegetation could affect stream shading and water temperature, bank strength and channel stability, and the recruitment to the stream channel of large, woody debris that provides important fish habitat. Commercial gravel operations could affect vegetation and possibly groundwater.

Figure 8. Noggle Creek.

Fish and Wildlife

Proposed Action: Under the proposed action, fish and wildlife habitat values would be protected and managed in perpetuity on the property. This would help ensure the persistence and productivity of grizzly bears, elk, lynx, and other wildlife species. The travel corridor linking the East and West Cabinet Mountains would be maintained, which is especially important for grizzly bears. The proposed action would also maintain critical winter habitat for moose and elk.

No-Action Alternative: Land development and associated human disturbance of the Plum Creek land would negatively affect habitat, likely reducing suitability and use of the lands by grizzly bears, elk, and other wildlife. The link between the East and West Cabinet Mountains for wildlife could be drastically reduced in quality. Negative effects to water quantity and quality, such as decreased flows, increased water temperatures, and increased sedimentation, could adversely impact native fish populations in the Lake Creek drainage.

HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Noise/Electrical Effects

Proposed Action: The proposed project would not have any effect on noise or cause any electrical disturbance.

No-Action Alternative: No action would mean that noise or electrical levels could increase because of future land development and construction.

Land Use

Proposed Action: Under the proposed action, FWP would manage the land for fish and wildlife habitat in perpetuity. Public access to the properties for hunting and other recreational uses consistent with the habitat values would also be maintained in perpetuity.

No-Action Alternative: On the project parcel, land use will change from timber-related to residential development. Public access will likely be lost if the lands are developed into residential tracts.

Risk/Health Hazards

Proposed Action: The proposed action includes the occasional use of chemicals for noxious weed control. Whenever chemicals are used, there is some potential for a small-scale spill. To reduce that potential, herbicides would only be applied by a licensed applicator following label instructions and taking all precautions to prevent accidental discharge.

No-Action Alternative: No action would mean that current risks or health hazards could change in the future on the project area, as the property is developed.

Community/Local Economy Impact

Proposed Action: The proposed action could affect the location and distribution of human population growth by restricting development of approximately one square mile of rural private land, some of which is wetland; however, this project is not anticipated to impact the overall rate of population growth in Lincoln or Sanders Counties. There may be minimal impacts to the local economy associated with the loss of subdivision opportunities on this acreage. Any adverse economic impacts of the land acquisition would be partially offset by longer-term increases in retail merchandise, food, lodging, and travel supplies associated with the increased wildlife- and outdoor-related recreational opportunities that would be offered by these public conservation lands.

FWP will make payments to Lincoln and Sanders Counties equivalent to the assessed property taxes for those properties that the agency acquires in fee.

No-Action Alternative: On the project area, the no-action alternative could mean increased tax revenue from subdivisions and development, perhaps offset by the resulting increase in the cost of public services that would be borne by county taxpayers. There could be short-term positive effects to the economy from real estate sales and associated construction.

Aesthetics/Recreation

Proposed Action: The proposed action would protect the aesthetic qualities and high scenic values of the property, as undeveloped land set against the backdrop of the rugged Cabinet Mountains. The proposed action would also maintain public hunting access, wildlife watching, and other recreational uses compatible with the wildlife habitat objectives.

No-Action Alternative: Aesthetics could change drastically with subdivision and development of the land. In addition, public access for hunting and other recreational purposes would likely be lost if the lands are developed and subdivided.

Cultural/Historic Resources

Proposed Action: There are no known cultural or historic resources on the project area, and if there were, the proposed action would preserve those resources.

No-Action Alternative: Other activities such as residential construction or gravel extractions could occur and may affect unknown cultural resources.

SECONDARY AND CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

Potential negative secondary or cumulative effects of the proposed project may be the loss of approximately 255 acres of potentially developable private land in Lincoln and Sanders Counties. This impact is not expected to be significant in either county as the acreage is small relative to the existing tax base. Additionally, there appears to be a strong supply of rural recreational tracts in both counties. It should be noted that often the costs to local governments to provide services to rural subdivisions exceed the tax payments made by residents of these developments.

The secondary and cumulative benefits of the proposed action on aquatic and terrestrial species in the Bull Lake area would be high. The proposed action in the Noggle Creek drainage will add significant protections for grizzly bear conservation. When combined with the other conservation and enhancement activities happening in the immediate area, this will greatly benefit local habitats. The proposed project provides cumulative benefits for Bull Lake water quality, benefiting bull trout and other aquatic and riparian/wetland species.

6. NEED FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

FWP determines that the Noggle Creek Project will have no significant environmental impacts, and therefore an environmental impact statement is not required. The draft EA is the appropriate level of analysis for the proposed action because: 1) rare, threatened, and endangered species should only be affected positively by the proposed action; 2) there are no long-term or irretrievable impacts to the physical environment; and 3) there are only minor impacts to the human environment.

Appendix A

BULL RIVER WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Management Plan

And Proposed Plan for the Noggle Creek Addition

INTRODUCTION

This Bull River Management Plan describes how the Bull River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is managed by FWP. The Noggle Creek addition would be managed under this plan upon approval of its acquisition. This plan provides an overview of the proposed conservation project; a summary of significant fish, wildlife, and habitat values associated with this property; and a description of the purpose, objectives, and management strategies that will be used to meet the overall conservation purposes. It also describes funding sources for the management of the Bull River WMA.

PROPERTY LOCATION AND FEATURES

The WMA is located in T28N, R33W, Section 9, and portions of Sections 4, 10, 15, and 16 in Sanders and Lincoln Counties. The Noggle Creek addition is located in the W½ of Section 3. This contiguous block, which is the Bull River Wildlife Management Area, is located south and east of Bull Lake in northwest Montana on the watershed divide between the Bull River and Lake Creek, about halfway between Noxon and Troy.

Improvements: There are no structures on the proposed 255-acre Noggle Creek addition. The existing WMA includes a log cabin used for administrative purposes.

RESOURCE VALUES

Topography: The proposed project includes approximately 255 acres of wetlands and upland habitats. The rolling topography with a noticeable isolated knob provides important winter habitat for big game, particularly elk. The existing WMA land consists of relatively flat upland bench dominated by 20-30-year-old conifer forest.

Riparian/Wetlands: The Noggle Creek property consists of open sedge meadows, spruce and cottonwood forests, and mesic shrubfields. The extensive wetlands and riparian complexes on the WMA comprise about 21% of the existing property and are critical to many wildlife species. They support nesting and migratory waterfowl; shorebirds; bald eagles, neo-tropical migrants, and cavity-nesting birds; semi-aquatic furbearers such as mink, beaver, or river otter; amphibians and reptiles; and many other small mammals and other wildlife species. The property also contains important spring and fall habitat for grizzly and black bears, seasonal habitat for furbearers such as fisher or wolverine, year-round habitat for moose, and winter range for elk and white-tailed deer. The wetland complexes, intermixed with various types of upland habitats located on a watershed divide between two major mountain ranges, make these lands particularly attractive to a wide variety of wildlife species.

Terrestrial Habitats: The principal upland terrestrial habitat on the WMA consists of regenerating lodgepole and Douglas fir forests on relatively flat benches. These lands provide important hiding cover for wildlife attracted to

the riparian/wetland areas and low elevation foraging habitat during various seasons. Approximately 100-150 elk use these bench lands on the WMA and Noggle Creek properties. Moose and white-tailed deer may use the upland benches and riparian areas year-round. The upland benches provide the critical grizzly bear movement corridor to and from the riparian areas from both the high elevations on either side of the project area. Maintaining the integrity of the uplands and wetlands will help sustain use by wildlife over time. The size and juxtaposition of the upland and riparian/wetland habitats located at the base of Bull Lake and between two major mountain ranges makes this one of the most important connections or travel corridors for wildlife moving between the East and West Cabinet mountain ranges.

BULL RIVER WMA MANAGEMENT PLAN

Management Goal:

The goals of the Noggle Creek acquisition are to protect the integrity of the existing WMA and allow compatible human recreation in the area. The management of other natural resources would occur as needed to restore, maintain, or enhance these natural habitat values and to meet property management needs.

Management Strategies:

Objective 1: Protect, maintain, and enhance aquatic, wetland, riparian, and associated terrestrial habitats with an emphasis on restoring and protecting aquatic organisms in the Bull River, Ross Creek, and Bull Lake areas.

a. Obtain appropriate baseline information for the property:

FWP would collect information needed for management including such items as topographic and soil maps, aerial photos, habitat maps, and locations of human activities sites such as roads, parking areas, gravel pits, weeds, fences, types of human recreation, etc. FWP would also gather baseline information on the distribution and abundance of aquatic and riparian/wetland species. Fisheries work includes periodic fall surveys for bull trout redds, fish shocking for species distribution and abundance in tributaries and along the main stem, and gill netting in Bull Lake. Information on stream flow and water conditions is collected. Information would be used to address management issues and to update management plans or develop appropriate habitat enhancement/restoration projects.

b. Implement noxious weed management program:

FWP identified noxious weed infestations on the WMA and will do so on the Noggle Creek property following closing of the land acquisition. Following identification of weed species and problem areas, FWP would develop a weed management plan and begin to implement control as soon as practical. The weed management plan will involve techniques with minimal side effects to fish and wildlife habitat and include such measures as chemical, hand pulling, and biological control.

c. Identify any appropriate changes in management or any other potential restoration or habitat improvement projects that might be needed.

Proposed restoration or enhancement activities would go through a public review process. The management plan for the Bull River WMA would also be revised from time to time based on periodic reviews.

Objective 2: Protect and maintain the important wildlife corridor linking the East and West Cabinet Mountains.

a. Surveys: FWP and its partners recognize the value of this project for migrating wildlife between the East and West Cabinet Mountains as well as for wildlife moving between the uplands and lowlands on a seasonal basis. FWP will continue to gather information on seasonal use of the project lands by wildlife to help identify key routes or use areas.

b. Forest Management: Forest management would be conducted solely for the purposes of meeting fish and wildlife habitat objectives. A general timber/forest inventory would be complete following acquisition of Noggle Creek in order to establish baseline forest conditions associated with current fish and wildlife species abundance, distribution, and diversity present on the property. The forest plan would focus on retaining or improving existing conditions for riparian/wetlands and maintaining a high degree of natural habitat diversity and structure in upland forests over time. The plan might include activities to promote upland forest development, limiting opportunities for human-caused fire, reducing fuels on dry sites through use of periodic harvest and/or fire, while also promoting natural, mature forest conditions. Riparian habitats will remain largely undisturbed except for activities such as weed control or fencing that may be needed.

Objective 3: Provide compatible, dispersed public recreational use of the property while also ensuring conservation of important habitat values.

a. Boundary: The perimeter of the WMA has been fenced and/or posted as the Bull River WMA. Existing usable fences that restrict livestock would remain along the perimeter where grazing of livestock is occurring outside of the WMA. However, if grazing is not occurring, then a more wildlife-friendly 2-strand fence could replace barbed wire or 4-strand fences. A similar approach would occur on the Noggle addition.

b. Parking: FWP identified primary access points to the WMA from Highway 56 and South Fork Bull River Road (410) and established appropriate parking sites. A site will also be located on the Noggle addition. Specific access points are not located in sensitive wetland or riparian areas.

c. Public Information: An information board would be constructed near the South Fork Bull River Road (410) and Highway 56.

d. Access: Management of public recreation favors dispersed, low-impact recreation such as hiking, bird watching, and hunting. Public access is allowed May 15 through November 30. The WMA is closed during winter to maintain an undisturbed area for wintering wildlife. Motorized access is prohibited on interior roads or trails and off roads. The public can use existing roads and trails for hiking, bicycling, and horseback riding.

e. Pets: Pets need to be on leash at all times except for trained dogs when bird hunting. At these times, the dogs must be under the control of the owner.

f. Camping: FWP prohibits overnight camping on the WMA to minimize impacts and management costs associated with overnight camping. Firewood cutting is not allowed.

g. Hunting: Hunting for legal game is allowed during authorized seasons, except that no hunting, trapping, fishing, or other recreational activities would be allowed during the WMA closed period of December 1 through May 14. Hunters must retrieve their game without motorized access.

h. Other Recreational Uses: FWP can permit other recreational uses if requested, such as issuing a special permit for scientific study or overnight stay on a case-by-case basis. This can be done as long as the use does not compromise or undermine the purposes for which the WMA was created.

i. Fishing: Fishing is allowed on the WMA. Parking is authorized in designated areas along the major access roads.

COMMERCIAL USES

Two ongoing, permitted, third-party land uses are in place on the WMA. None are anticipated on the Noggle Creek addition.

1. Gravel Storage: The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) continues their permitted use of an existing gravel storage area located west of Highway 56 south of Bull Lake on approximately 5 acres.

2. Welcome Signs: Lincoln County has a permit to maintain “Kootenai Country” welcome signs on the WMA located along Highway 56 near the border of Lincoln and Sanders Counties.

FWP supports these limited uses of the WMA lands for gravel storage and for the county signs, as these purposes do not interfere with the purpose of the WMA and they do provide other community and public safety benefits.

RESERVED ACCESS

As part of its conveyance of the WMA lands to FWP via The Conservation Fund, Plum Creek reserved a one-mile-long, 60-foot-wide road easement along the eastern boundary of the WMA. This reserved easement provides Plum Creek with a secondary access to the Noggle Creek property. This easement, along with another 60-foot-wide road easement along an existing access road on the Noggle Creek property will be transferred to The Conservation Fund & Revett upon purchase of their portion of the property.

OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

Fee-title lands that have been acquired by FWP are managed as the Bull River Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The land is managed with operations funded primarily through the annual budgets for the Lower Clark Fork aquatic and terrestrial implementation programs. Avista funds these programs as a result of the Clark Fork Settlement Agreement associated with the relicensing of Cabinet Gorge and Noxon Rapids Dams. FWP submits budget requests through the appropriate committees each year. FWP will pay annual management costs of the proposed Noggle Creek addition.

Appendix B

NOGGLE CREEK CONSERVATION PROJECT

SOCIOECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS

August 2007

I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature (MCA 87-1-241 and MCA 87-1-242), authorizes Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) 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 255 acres of land presently owned by Plum Creek Timber Company, L.P.

II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

A. Property Description

The Noggle Creek property (Lincoln & Sanders Counties, T28N, R33W, West ½ of Section 3) is contiguous with the existing Bull River Wildlife Management Area. The property is located about 20 miles south of Troy, Montana, along the watershed divide between Bull River and Lake Creek drainages in Lincoln and Sanders Counties. This proposed fee title purchase encompasses 255 acres. A detailed description of this property begins on page 3 of the draft environmental assessment (EA).

B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations

Detailed descriptions of the habitat and fish and wildlife resources are provided in the draft EA.

C. Current Use

As mentioned in the draft EA, the upland portions of the 255-acre parcel currently owned by Plum Creek were logged within the past 20-30 years and do not contain commercial grade timber. The remaining lands are predominately open wetlands.

D. FWP Management Alternatives

1) Fee title purchase of the subject property by FWP.
2) No purchase, leading to residential development.

Alternative 1. Fee title purchase of the property will protect the integrity of this area as a corridor for grizzly bears and other wildlife to move between the East and West Cabinet Mountains, preserve important habitats including winter range for large ungulates, and provide for public access to the property.

Alternative 2. The option of no purchase would lead to residential development of the property. Plum Creek has received preliminary approval from Lincoln and Sanders Counties for subdividing the property into 25 residential lots.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Section II identified the management alternatives this report addresses. Fee title purchase will provide long-term protection of important fish and wildlife habitats 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 FWP and review 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 FWP are related to the fee title purchase price and the maintenance/management costs. The money for the fee title purchase is from the department's Habitat Montana program, which is funded through sale of hunting licenses. Habitat Montana also funds WMA management costs.

The fee title lands purchased will be managed as part of the Bull River Wildlife Management Area. Annual maintenance/management costs associated with the entire WMA are about $4,500.

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." The 2006 property taxes paid in full by Plum Creek Timberlands on its entire 655-acre holdings in Sections 3 and 11, T28N, R33W, were $564 to Lincoln County and $195 to Sanders County. Following the proposed transaction, the annual tax equivalent payments to be paid by FWP for its 255 acres are estimated to be $250 to Lincoln and $25 to Sanders. Taxes on the remaining 400 acres will be paid by Revett Minerals, which will be purchasing that land from Plum Creek Timberlands simultaneously with FWP's purchase. Overall, the total property tax income to the counties from the payments by FWP and Revett will be the same amount as the property tax payments that Plum Creek Timberlands has been paying. FWP will continue to pay the tax assessment on the properties at the rate it would be taxable to a private citizen.

B. Economic Impacts

The purchase of this land will have no impacts on the timber industry. As the draft EA states, this land was logged within the past 25 years and does not contain large amounts of commercial grade timber. FWP plans to undertake appropriate management activities to produce and maintain a healthy, mature forest. Long-term timber management would be focused on meeting fish and wildlife management objectives. The addition of the Noggle Creek lands to the Wildlife Management Area may provide some positive financial impacts to local businesses due to the weed control, fencing, parking area improvements, and annual maintenance.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The fee title purchase of the Noggle Creek addition will not have a significant effect on tax revenues collected by Lincoln and Sanders Counties since FWP is required by law to pay the assessment that a private party would pay on these lands.

The financial impact to local businesses will be neutral to positive. The properties do not contain any significant amount of commercial timber since these trees were cut in the past 20-30 years. Public hunting has been allowed on the Plum Creek land through the Block Management Program and access will continue to be provided.

Bull River WMA

2006 Small Mammal Trapping and Species Inventory Report

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP)
Steve Carson, Hillary Welsh and Brandy Murray
June 5-11, 2006

Cinnamon Teal

Findings

- **9 Major habitats Surveyed (Table 1)**
- **187 Captures, 12 Species (Table 2 and 3)**
- **65 Species Observed (Table 4)**

Table 1. Trapline Location and Habitat Type
Survey Site: Bull River WMA

Location #	Name	Habitat
1	Line 1	Early stage coniferous
2	Line 2	Early stage coniferous
3	Line 3	Middle stage coniferous
4	Line 4	Middle stage coniferous
5	Line 5	Old growth coniferous
6	Line 6	Old growth coniferous
7	Line 7	Meadow edge
8	Line 8	Meadow edge
9	Line 9	Short marsh/shrubland
10	Line 10	Short marsh/shrubland
11	Line 11	Cottonwood/riparian
12	Line 12	Cottonwood/riparian
13	Location 13	Coniferous bog
14	Location 14	Marsh/pond
15	Cabin	Meadow/coniferous

Painted Turtle

Table 2. Captures Summary

Species Captured		Trapline															
Latin Name	Common Name	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	Total Captures
Perisoreus Canadensis	Gray Jay				1												1
Geothlypis Trichas	Common Yellowthroat										1						1
Pipilo Maculatus	Spotted Towhee	1															1
Salvelinus Fontinalis	Brook Trout														1		1
Catostomus Catostomus	Longnose Sucker														9		9
Sorex Vagrans	Vagrant Shrew		1		2			16	16	4	4	29	8				80
Sorex Monticolus	Montane Shrew		1					5	3	1		3	3				16
Tamias Amoenus	Yellow-pine Chipmunk	5	10									2					17
Spermophilus Columbianus	Columbian Ground Squirrel		2	3	6												11
Peromyscus Maniculatus	Deer Mouse	8	11	1	6	3	4	1	1				1				36
Microtus Pennsylvanicus	Meadow Vole						1	2	2	1							6
Zapus Princeps	Western Jumping Mouse							2		1	4		1				8
Total Captures		14	25	4	15	3	5	26	22	7	9	34	13	0	10	0	187

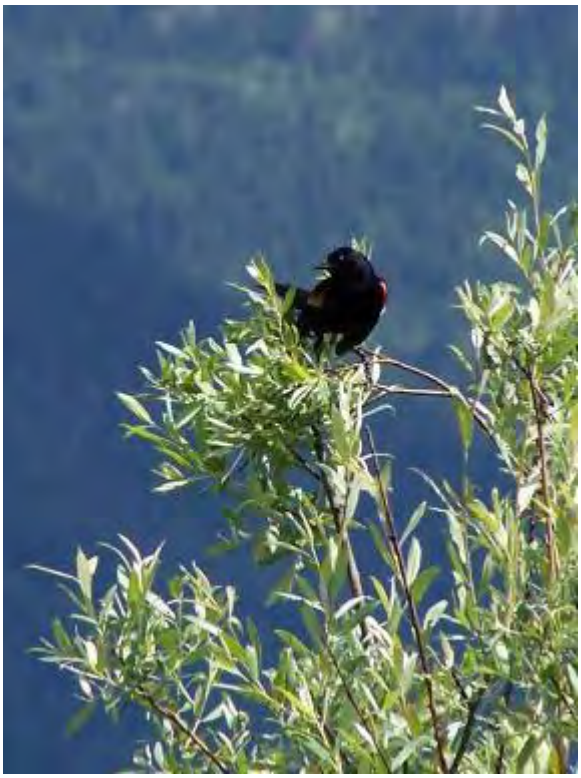
Table 3. Trapline Summary

	Trapline																		
Trap Type	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	13	14	15	**Total Trap Nights**	**Total Captures**	**Captures/100 Trap Nights**	**Number of Species**
Snap, small (victor)	46	45	20	33	33	49	48	45	47	45	43	45	57	0	0	556	22	4.0	5
Snap, med (museum special)	39	36	21	27	30	36	40	39	48	42	44	30	0	0	0	432	61	14.1	9
Snap, large (rat)	10	10	9	5	9	9	10	10	9	10	10	10	0	0	0	111	0	0.0	0
Cage, small (sherman)	50	47	46	49	47	49	50	50	49	52	48	45	40	0	0	622	24	3.9	4
Cage, med (rat)	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0.0	0
Cage, med (skunk)	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	8	9	10	0	0	0	117	11	9.4	1
Mistnet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	0	0.0	0
Pitfall	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	25	24	76	25	25	0	0	0	350	61	17.4	4
Funnel Trap	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	0	11	10	90.9	2
Total Trap Nights	180	173	131	150	154	178	183	179	187	233	180	165	97	11	1	2202			
Total Captures	14	25	4	15	3	5	26	22	7	9	34	13	0	10	0				
Captures/100 Trap Nights	7.8	14.5	3.1	10.0	1.9	2.8	14.2	12.3	3.7	3.9	18.9	7.9	0.0	90.9	0.0				
Number of Species	3	5	2	4	1	2	5	4	4	3	3	4	0	2	0				

Table 4. Miscellaneous Species Observed

Latin Name	Common Name
Rana Luteiventris	Columbia Spotted Frog
Anas Cyanoptera	Cinnamon Teal
Aythya Collaris	Ring-necked Duck
Bucephala Clangula	Common Goldeneye
Lophodytes Cucullatus	Hooded Merganser
Cathartes Aura	Turkey Vulture
Pandion Haliaetus	Osprey
Haliaeetus Leucocephalus	Bald Eagle
Circus Cyaneus	Northern Harrier
Buteo Jamaicensis	Red-tailed Hawk
Aquila Chrysaetos	Golden Eagle
Bonasa Umbellus	Ruffed Grouse
Rallus Limicola	Virginia Rail
Porzana Carolina	Sora
Charadrius Vociferus	Killdeer
Gallinago Gallinago	Common Snipe
Chordeiles Minor	Common Nighthawk
Aeronautes Saxatalis	White-throated Swift
Archilochus Alexandri	Black-chinned Hummingbird
Stellula Calliope	Calliope Hummingbird
Selasphorus Rufus	Rufous Hummingbird
Ceryle Alcyon	Belted Kingfisher
Sphyrapicus Nuchalis	Red-naped Sapsucker
Picoides Pubescens	Downy Woodpecker
Picoides Villosus	Hairy Woodpecker
Colaptes Auratus	Northern Flicker
Dryocopus Pileatus	Pileated Woodpecker
Contopus Sordidulus	Western Wood-pewee
Empidonax Traillii	Willow Flycatcher
Empidonax Hammondii	Hammond's Flycatcher
Tyrannus Tyrannus	Eastern Kingbird
Tachycineta Bicolor	Tree Swallow
Tachycineta Thalassina	Violet-green Swallow
Stelgidopteryx Serripennis	Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Corvus Brachyrhynchos	American Crow
Corvus Corax	Common Raven
Poecile Gambeli	Mountain Chickadee
Cistothorus Palustris	Marsh Wren
Regulus Calendula	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Catharus Ustulatus	Swainson's Thrush
Turdus Migratorius	American Robin
Vireo Cassinii	Cassin's Vireo
Vermivora Celata	Orange-crowned Warbler
Dendroica Petechia	Yellow Warbler
Dendroica Coronata	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Dendroica Townsendi	Townsend's Warbler
Setophaga Ruticilla	American Redstart

Geothlypis Trichas	Common Yellowthroat
Piranga Ludoviciana	Western Tanager
Pipilo Maculatus	Spotted Towhee
Pooecetes Gramineus	Vesper Sparrow
Melospiza Melodia	Song Sparrow
Junco Hyemalis	Dark-eyed Junco
Dolichonyx Oryzivorus	Bobolink
Agelaius Phoeniceus	Red-winged Blackbird
Icterus Bullockii	Bullock's Oriole
Salvelinus Fontinalis	Brook Trout
Castor Canadensis	American Beaver
Canis Latrans	Coyote
Cervus Elaphus	Elk
Odocoileus Hemionus	Mule Deer
Odocoileus Virginianus	White-tailed Deer
Alces Alces	Moose
Chrysemys Picta	Painted Turtle
Thamnophis Elegans	Western Terrestrial Garter Snake



Red-winged Blackbird

Eastern Kingbird

Trapline Photos

Trapline 1

Trapline 2

Trapline 3

Trapline 4

Trapline 5

Trapline 6

Trapline 7

Trapline 8

Trapline 9

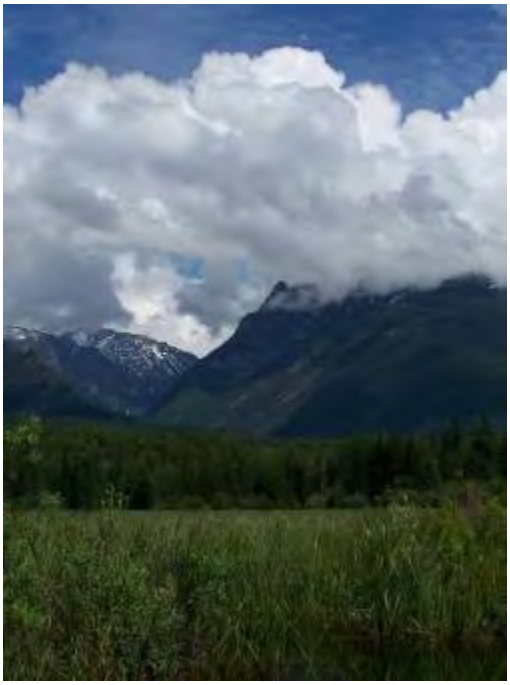
Trapline 10

Trapline 11

Trapline 12

Location 13

Location 14



Cabin

Photo Credits: MFWP staff unless otherwise noted.

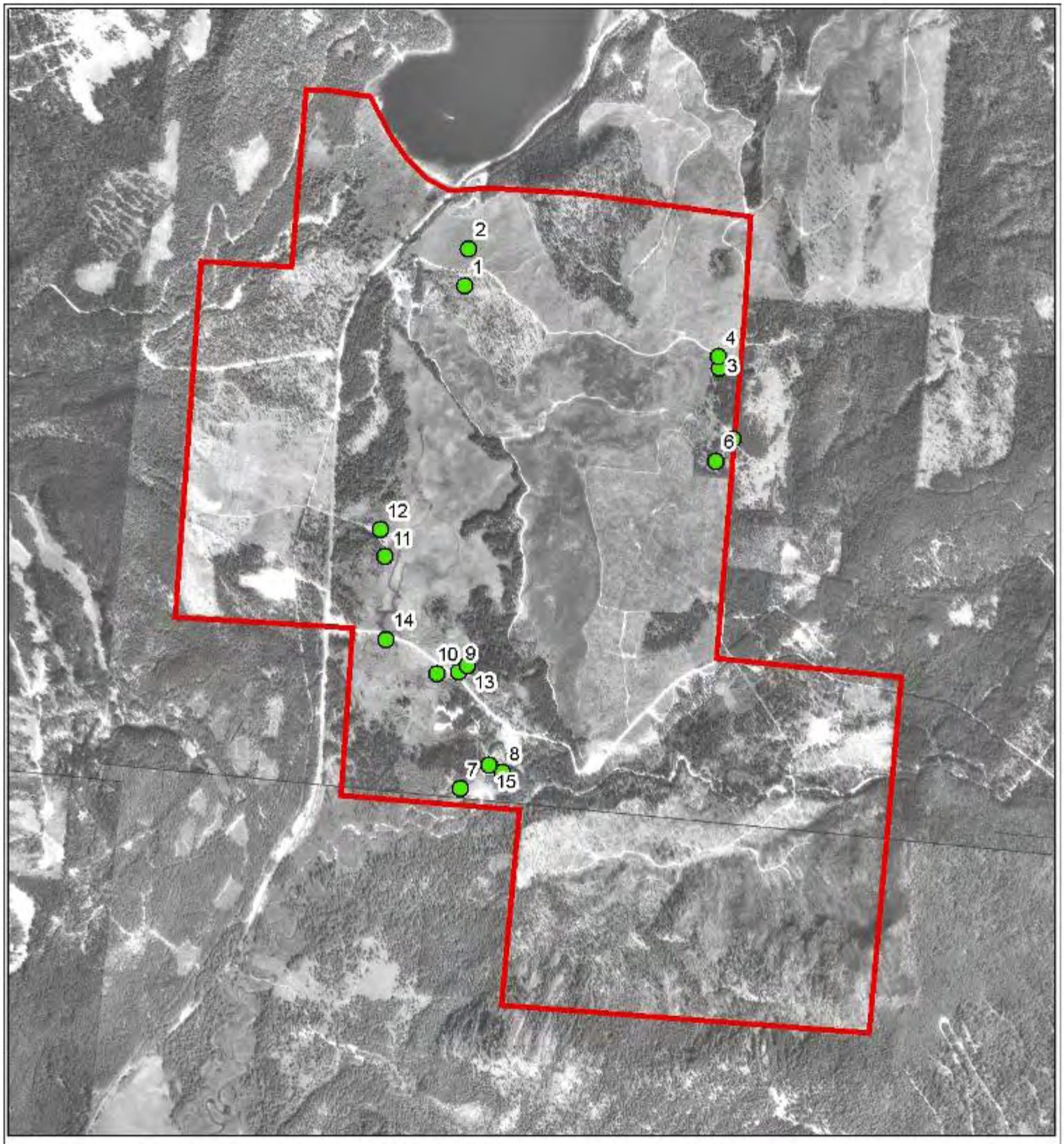


Figure 1: **Bull River Wildlife Management Area**

Trapping locations

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

N

0 0.5 1 Miles

9/2006 SJC W:\Wildlife\SWIG_PROJECTS\SmallMammalSurveys\Project_data