



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region One
490 North Meridian Rd.
Kalispell, MT 59901
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Ref:JS053-12
May 21, 2012

TO: *Governor's Office, Attn: Mike Volesky, PO Box 200801, Helena, 59620-0801
*Environmental Quality Council, PO Box 20, Helena, 59620-1704
*Dept. of Environmental Quality, Planning, Prevention & Assistance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901
*Dept. of Environmental Quality, Permitting Compliance, PO Box 200901, Helena, 59620-0901
*Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Director's Office – Reg Peterson, Legal Unit – Jessica Snyder; Rebecca Cooper
*Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, PO Box 278, Pablo, 59855
*DNRC, PO Box 201601, Helena, 59620-1601 (Patty Greene)
*DNRC, Steve Frye, Kalispell
*Montana Historical Society, SHPO, 225 North Roberts, Veteran's Memorial Building, Helena, 59620-1201
*Montana State Library, 1515 East Sixth Ave., Helena, 59620-1800
*Adam McLane, Montana Environmental Information Center, PO Box 1184, Helena, 59624
George Ochenski, 4 Harrison Road, Helena, MT 59601
*Wayne Hirst, Montana State Parks Foundation, PO Box 728, Libby, 59923
*Montana State Parks Association, PO Box 699, Billings, 59103
*Joe Gutkoski, President, Montana River Action Network, 304 N 18th Ave., Bozeman, 59715
*Representatives Janna Taylor, Daniel Salomon, Scott Reichner, & Mark Blasdel
*Senators Carmine Bowbray & Verdell Jackson
Lake County Commissioners, 106 Fourth Avenue East, Polson, 59860

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), Region One, has completed an environmental assessment (EA) for a proposed action involving agricultural activities being performed by a private operator to supplement agency activities aimed at improving food and cover managed as wildlife habitat at the Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area in Lake County, Montana.

The draft EA was out for a 2-week public review through May 17, 2012. Three comments were received that shared concerns, but all in favor of the project. There were no modifications to the draft EA; therefore, the plan is accepted as written, and the draft EA and the decision notice serve as the final document. Please contact Wildlife Area Manager John Grant, Ninepipe WMA at (406) 644-2510 or e-mail to jgrant@mt.gov with questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Jim Satterfield Jr., Ph.D.
Regional Supervisor

Enclosure
c: Interested Parties



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region 1
490 North Meridian Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

Ninepipe WMA Habitat Enhancement Decision Notice

May 21, 2012

Proposal:

The habitat conservation project proposal for the Ninepipe Wildlife Management Area (WMA) involves using the services of a private agricultural contractor to improve the condition of nesting habitat wherein a crop of hay is a by-product. By cutting and removing annual production of tame herbaceous vegetation, the stand maintains vigor, productivity, and resistance to invasion by noxious weeds, thereby increasing its function as habitat, prolonging its lifespan, and saving FWP maintenance and restoration costs. To compensate FWP for the value of the hay crop harvested and kept by the contractor, the contractor will provide additional agricultural services at other locations on the WMA in cooperation with FWP staff to improve habitat. The most significant activity will be cultivation, but likely will include picking rock, maintaining irrigation systems, and mowing weeds. This will benefit the WMA by accomplishing additional wildlife habitat improvements without additional expense or labor for FWP.

Environmental Policy Act Process:

FWP is required to assess potential impacts of the proposed project to the human and physical environment. In compliance with requirements of the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), a draft environmental assessment (EA) was completed by FWP and released for a two-week public comment period from May 3 through May 17, 2012. Public notices were posted in local newspapers and libraries, and copies of the EA were available at the Region One headquarters in Kalispell and on the FWP website.

Public Comments:

Three comments were received that shared concerns, but all in favor of the project. There were no modifications to the draft EA based on public comment, and the draft EA and decision notice serve as the final document.

Summary of Issues Addressed in the EA:

The two issues identified were haying dates and application of weed control chemicals. Maintaining vigorous and productive stands of alfalfa hay will provide benefits both to the soil as a legume crop and to insects, which serve as food for

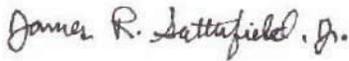
pheasants and other upland birds. FWP does not plan to begin any haying activity until after July 15, which should protect nesting birds. Additionally, haying is only planned on 200 acres out of approximately 4,000 acres on the WMA.

Application of weed control chemicals requires a valid and updated applicator's license. Therefore only FWP staff or county employees would probably be eligible for that type of activity. FWP will focus the sharecropper's activities on mechanical mowing rather than chemical application.

Decision

Through the MEPA process, FWP found no significant impacts on the human or physical environments associated with this proposal. Therefore, the EA is the appropriate level of analysis, and an environmental impact statement is not required.

Based on the EA and public comment, it is my decision to accept the Ninepipe WMA Habitat Enhancement proposal as written.



May 21, 2012

James R. Satterfield Jr., Ph.D.
Regional Supervisor

Date