



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

P.O. Box 1630, Miles City, MT 59301

Telephone (406) 234-0900 ~ Fax (406) 234-4368

March 10, 2015

To:

Governor's Office, Tim Baker, PO Box 200802, Helena, MT 59620*

Environmental Quality Council, Todd Everts, Capitol Bldg, Room 106, PO Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620 *

Montana Dept. of Environmental Quality, Bonnie Lovelace, PO Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620*

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*:

-Director's Office (Coleen Furthmyre)

-Wildlife Division (Merissa Hayes)

-Legal Unit (Kaedy Horne)

-Design & Construction (Paul Valle)

-Lands Section (Candace Durran)

-Regional Information Officer's/ Office Managers/Reg Supervisors

-Fisheries Division (Beth Giddings)

Matthew Tourtlotte, MT FWP Commissioner, 940 Blonco Circle, Billings, MT 59105*

MT DNRC, Southern Land Office, Matt Wolcott, 1371 Rimtop Dr., Billings, MT 59105*

Montana Historical Society, State Preservation Office, Brian Showers, PO Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202

Montana Environmental Information Center, Adam McLane, PO Box 1184, Helena, MT 59624

Montana State Library, 1515 E. Sixth Ave, PO Box 201800, Helena, MT 59620

Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council, PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624*

Montana Wildlife Federation, Dave Chadwick, PO Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624*

Treasure Co. Commissioners, Morris Spannagel, chair, 307 Rapelje, Hysham, MT 59038*

Rosebud/Treasure Wildlife Association, c/o Bob Vannattan, P.O. Box 488, Forsyth, MT 59327

Bob Redland, neighbor, 88 Redland Ranch Rd, Hysham, MT 59038*

Haveman Ranch LLC, neighbor, HC 72 Box 925, Hysham, MT 59038

Ruth Baue, neighbor, 38 Webb Rd, Hysham, MT 59038

Greg Lackman, neighbor, 38 Muri Rd, Hysham, MT 59038*

(*sent electronically)

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP), Region 7, recently proposed to renew a 5-year (April 15, 2015 – March 31, 2020) agricultural lease on a portion of **Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area** (WMA) near Hysham, MT. The objective of the proposed lease is to provide enhanced wildlife habitat and to increase wintering use of wildlife on the WMA. A draft Environmental Assessment (EA) was available for viewing and public comment until March 2; no comments were received.

After review of this proposal, it is our decision to accept the draft EA as supplemented by this Decision Notice as final, and to recommend the continuation of the agricultural lease for Isaac Homestead WMA.

The Final EA may be viewed on MFWP's website: <http://www.fwp.mt.gov> or can be obtained upon request from MFWP Region 7 Headquarters, P.O. Box 1630, Miles City, MT 59301 (406) 234-0900.

Thank you for your interest,

Brad Schmitz

Regional Supervisor, Region 7

Enc.



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

**DECISION NOTICE for the Draft Environmental Assessment:
Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area Agricultural Lease**
Region 7 Headquarters
PO Box 1630, Miles City, MT 59301
(406) 234-0900

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION:

The proposed areas of action were cultivated prior to MFWP owning this property. For several years MFWP has utilized similar agricultural leases to help achieve the management goals of providing hunting opportunity for white-tailed deer and pheasants while maintaining wildlife populations and habitats on the property in a viable, healthy condition. MFWP has used these agricultural leases to establish share-crop agreements with local producers who assist with managing existing farm land on the WMA to provide food and cover for wildlife throughout their annual cycle.

Not all of the 345 acres of crop land will be in commercial production at a given time. Depending on the year and rotation cycle approximately 45 to 65% of the 345 acres will be in a marketable crop. A rotation between commercial crops and habitat plot will be followed for many of the agriculture fields. Habitat plots could consist of annual food/cover plots, perennial food/cover plots or a mix of grasses and forbs. The purpose of a grass/forb planting will be to create residual cover, beneficial to the reproductive cycle of pheasants and other wildlife. The specific type of commercial crop as well as the design of the habitat plot on the property will be approved by the area wildlife biologist prior to any cultivation.

The lessee will be required to utilize farming practices that increase the productivity of the land. These include fertilizing and conditioning the soil, treating of noxious weeds, and maintaining fields in good condition.

ALTERNATIVE TO PROPOSED ACTION:

Alternative A: No Action: Agricultural lease will not be renewed and agricultural lands will not be cultivated. This alternative would require MFWP to commit resources to manage weeds on 345 acres of previously cultivated fields. Wildlife would be negatively impacted by lack of wintering habitat and food resources.

Alternative B: Proposed Action: Continue agricultural production: Agricultural lease will be established on farm fields. Approximately 45 to 65% of the 345 acres of crop land will be in commercial production at a given time. Wildlife will benefit because high-quality wintering habitat and forage will be available. The lessee(s), MFWP and sportsmen will mutually benefit through the sharecrop agreement.

PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS:

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 (Isaac Homestead Wildlife Management Area Agricultural Lease) on January 26, 2015 and accepted public comment until 5:00 P. M. on March 2, 2015.

Legal notice of the proposal and availability of the draft EA was published in the *Miles City Star* and the *Forsyth Independent Press*. 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"). An FWP statewide news release was issued and posted on FWP's website (<http://fwp.mt.gov/>, "News Releases").

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments were received.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comments were received.

DECISION NOTICE

Utilizing the EA and public comment, a decision must be rendered by MFWP which addresses the concerns and issues identified for this proposed action.

MFWP's analysis supports the agricultural lease of the Isaac Homestead WMA 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 by this Decision Notice as final, and to recommend the continuation of the agricultural lease for Isaac Homestead WMA.

The Final EA may be viewed on MFWP's Internet website: <http://www.fwp.mt.gov> or be obtained upon request from Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Region 7 Headquarters, P.O. Box 1630, Miles City, Mt. 59301 (406) 234-0900.



Brad R. Schmitz
R7 Regional Supervisor

March 9, 2015

Date