

**Farm Lease Extension  
North Shore of Flathead Lake  
Draft  
Environmental Assessment  
July 6, 2015**



***Montana Fish,  
Wildlife & Parks***

**Farm Lease Extension North Shore of Flathead Lake  
Draft Environmental Assessment  
MEPA, NEPA, MCA 23-1-110 CHECKLIST**

**PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION**

1. **Type of proposed state action:** To extend two existing farm lease contracts for a 1-year time period of September 1, 2015, to September 1, 2016, on two separate parcels (North Shore State Park/Wildlife Management Area [WMA] and North Shore WMA).

2. **Agency authority for the proposed action:** Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

3. **Anticipated schedule:**

Estimated project commencement date: September 1, 2015  
Estimated completion date: August 31, 2016

4. **Location affected by proposed action (county, range and township):**

Flathead County, Montana, North Shore State Park/WMA: T27N, R20W, 159.75 acres and North Shore WMA: T27N, R20W, E ½ of Section 21, 189.509 acres

5. **Project size:** Approximately 255 acres as described above and shown in Attachment A and Attachment B.

	<u>Acres</u>		<u>Acres</u>
(a) Developed:		(d) Floodplain	<u>0</u>
Residential	<u>0</u>		
Industrial	<u>0</u>	(e) Productive:	
(existing shop area)		Irrigated cropland	<u>0</u>
(b) Open Space/ Woodlands/Recreation	<u>0</u>	Dry cropland	<u>255</u>
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas	<u>0</u>	Forestry	<u>0</u>
		Rangeland	<u>0</u>
		Other	<u>0</u>

6. **Listing of any other local, state, or federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction:**

(a) **Permits:** Permits will be filed at least 2 weeks prior to project start.

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permits</u>
None	

(b) **Funding:** There would be no cost to the agency to continue these lease crop-share agreements.

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks	\$0.00

**(c) Other overlapping or additional jurisdictional responsibilities:**

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Type of Responsibility</u>
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**7. Narrative summary: Farm Lease Extension North Shore of Flathead Lake**

FWP proposes to extend the existing farming contracts of the two current farmers for the North Shore State Park/WMA and the North Shore WMA. These two properties (160 and 189 acres respectively) are on the north shore of Flathead Lake adjacent to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Waterfowl Production Area. Both properties have been managed with a farm lease since their purchase by FWP and both are valid through 2015. In return for the lease, the lessee for North Shore State Park/WMA has provided no less than 15% of their crop acres for wildlife food plots each year, planted grass cover along the perimeter of the property, controlled noxious weeds, and repaired/maintained fences on the property. The lessee for North Shore WMA will plant 10-12 acres of an approved cover crop. The strategies for maintaining agricultural lands are as follows:

- a) FWP plans to gradually decrease the amount of land managed as cropland as habitat restoration projects are implemented as described in the Management Plan.
- b) Implement rotation farm plan for the remaining agricultural lands that provides wildlife habitat such as grain, winter cover, and nesting cover in a way that also returns nitrogen and other plant materials to the soil.
- c) Avoid farming within 300 feet of wetlands; use the least amount of chemicals required for weed or pest control and the least amount of fertilizer.
- d) Manage lands to attract wildlife use and discourage game damage or other unwanted wildlife impacts to adjoining lands.
- e) Control noxious weeds and invasive species in a manner that minimizes impacts to native vegetation and water quality.
- f) Coordinate weed and other land management activities with adjoining landowners and others active in local weed management efforts.

**8. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives (including the no action alternative) to the proposed action whenever alternatives are reasonably available and prudent to consider and a discussion of how the alternatives would be implemented:**

**Alternative A: No Action**

Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not extend the lease for either property. There will be no farming on the properties for October 2015 through September 2016, and this will result in the spread of noxious weeds within the property boundaries as well as to adjoining properties. The amount of spring forage for migrating waterfowl will decline, decreasing the wildlife values of the properties.

**Alternative B: Proposed Action**

Under the Proposed Action, FWP will extend the farming lease contracts by one year for both the WMA and State Park/WMA properties. This will allow FWP to continue to control noxious weeds on the properties, provide migrating waterfowl habitat, and provide additional time to work on management objectives and plans for all North Shore properties.

**PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW CHECKLIST**

**1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action and No-Action alternatives, including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.**

**A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					Comment Index
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	
a. Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?		X				
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 siltation, 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:						

1b. Under the Proposed Action, there would be minor impacts to topsoil during the farming process. The farming process will help maintain fertility of the soils through the current crop rotation strategy.

2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (Also see 13c.)			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 of 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? (Also see 2a.)		X				
f. Other:						

2a. Under the Proposed Action, there would be very minor impacts to air quality from farm equipment emissions and possibly spring burning of residual grain stubble.

3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality, including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen, or turbidity?		X				
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater 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				3h.
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 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? (Also see 3c.)		X				
m. For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a.)		X				
n. Other:						

Under the Proposed Action, there would be no impacts to surface or groundwater quantity or impacts to any water rights.

3h. There is the potential for minor impacts to water quality with the use of herbicides and pesticides. The farmers will be in compliance with all provisions of federal and state laws regarding such substances.

4. <u>VEGETATION</u> Will the proposed action result in?	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
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				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X			4e.
f. For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		X				
g. Other:						

4a. Under the Proposed Action, crops should not change from those previously planted on these properties.

4e. Under the No-Action, without farming it is highly likely that the properties will see a dramatic increase in the number and abundance of noxious weeds.

5. <u>FISH/WILDLIFE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				4a.
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?		X				4b.
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				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest, or other human activity)?		X				
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:						

Under the Proposed Action, feeding areas for migratory habitat for waterfowl will be retained.

4a. Under the No-Action, habitat suitability would decrease and provide little to no forage for migrating waterfowl.

4b. The number of migratory waterfowl using the WMAs would decrease during spring 2016 migration.

## B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Increases in existing noise levels?		X				
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:						

Under the Proposed Action, there would be minimal noise impacts from farming equipment.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				7a.
b. Conflict 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:						

Under the proposed action existing land uses would continue for another year.

7a. Under the No-Action, there would be minimal impacts to existing land use of the properties. The properties would not be farmed for at least one year, directly impacting the current rotation of crops.

<b>8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u></b>  <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT</b>					
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>	<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
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				
d. For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		X				
e. Other:						

8a. Under the Proposed Action, there is the potential for impacts from use of fertilizers and pesticides. The farmers will be in compliance with all provisions of federal and state laws regarding such substances.

<b>9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u></b>  <b>Will the proposed action result in:</b>	<b>IMPACT</b>					
	<b>Unknown</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>Minor</b>	<b>Potentially Significant</b>	<b>Can Impact Be Mitigated</b>	<b>Comment Index</b>
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
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				9c.
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				
f. Other:						

Under the Proposed Action, there would be no direct impacts to the community other than the small, positive contribution that these lands provide to the local agricultural economy.

9c. Under the No-Action, FWP lands would not be farmed, and current farmers would lose income generated from the crops.

10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental 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. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?		X				
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased use of any energy source?			X			10d.
e. Define projected revenue sources		X				10e.
f. Define projected maintenance costs.		X				10f.
g. Other:						

10a. Under the Proposed Action, there would be no impacts to government services.

10d. Proposed action would result in slight increase in fuel to run farm equipment.

10e & f. The extension of these contracts will create no revenue or costs for FWP.

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

11c. Under the Proposed Action, wildlife food plots should increase the opportunity for public enjoyment of wildlife on the properties through hunting and/or wildlife viewing.

12. <b><u>CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES</u></b> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Destruction or alteration of any site, structure, or object of prehistoric, historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses 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. (Also see 12a.)		X				
e. Other:						

Under the Proposed Action, there would be no direct impacts to cultural/historical resources. These properties have been farmed for decades, so no new impacts are anticipated.

## SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. <u>SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE</u>  Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT					
	Unknown	None	Minor	Potentially Significant	Can Impact Be Mitigated	Comment Index
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
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				13e.
f. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e.)		X				
g. <u>For P-R/D-J</u> , list any federal or state permits required.		X				

Under the Proposed Action, there would be no direct cumulative or secondary impacts.

13e. Under the No-Action, there would be the potential for debate or controversy with surrounding landowners regarding FWP management of WMA (e.g., weeds, lack of farming, etc.)

### 2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

These properties currently limit public access from March 1 to July 15 consistent with the current closure on the neighboring federal WMA. Gates and fences around the parcels prevent vehicle access to most portions of farmed fields to ensure crops are protected. Existing infrastructure and WMA rules help to mitigate the public's use of this area to ensure that no environmental degradation or significant impacts to fish, wildlife, and their habitats occur.

## PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

This analysis did not reveal any significant impacts to the human or physical environment. No additional construction or improvements of any kind are included in this proposal. The current management plans and WMA rules provide for seasonal closures and additional restrictions. Future habitat restoration proposals will be subject to future draft EA and public review processes.

## **PART IV. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

### **1. Public involvement for this project:**

The draft EA will be available on the FWP web site, at local libraries, and at Region One FWP headquarters. Copies of this EA will be available to the neighboring landowners, current farming contractors, and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

### **Duration of comment period:**

This draft will be out for a 2-week public review through July 20, 2015.

Comments can be mailed to the address below:

Nancy Ivy  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
490 North Meridian Road  
Kalispell, MT 59901

Or email: [nivy@mt.gov](mailto:nivy@mt.gov)

## **PART V. EA PREPARATION**

### **1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? No**

Based upon the above assessment, which has identified a limited number of minor impacts from the proposed action, an EIS is not required and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of review.

### **2. Persons responsible for preparing the EA:**

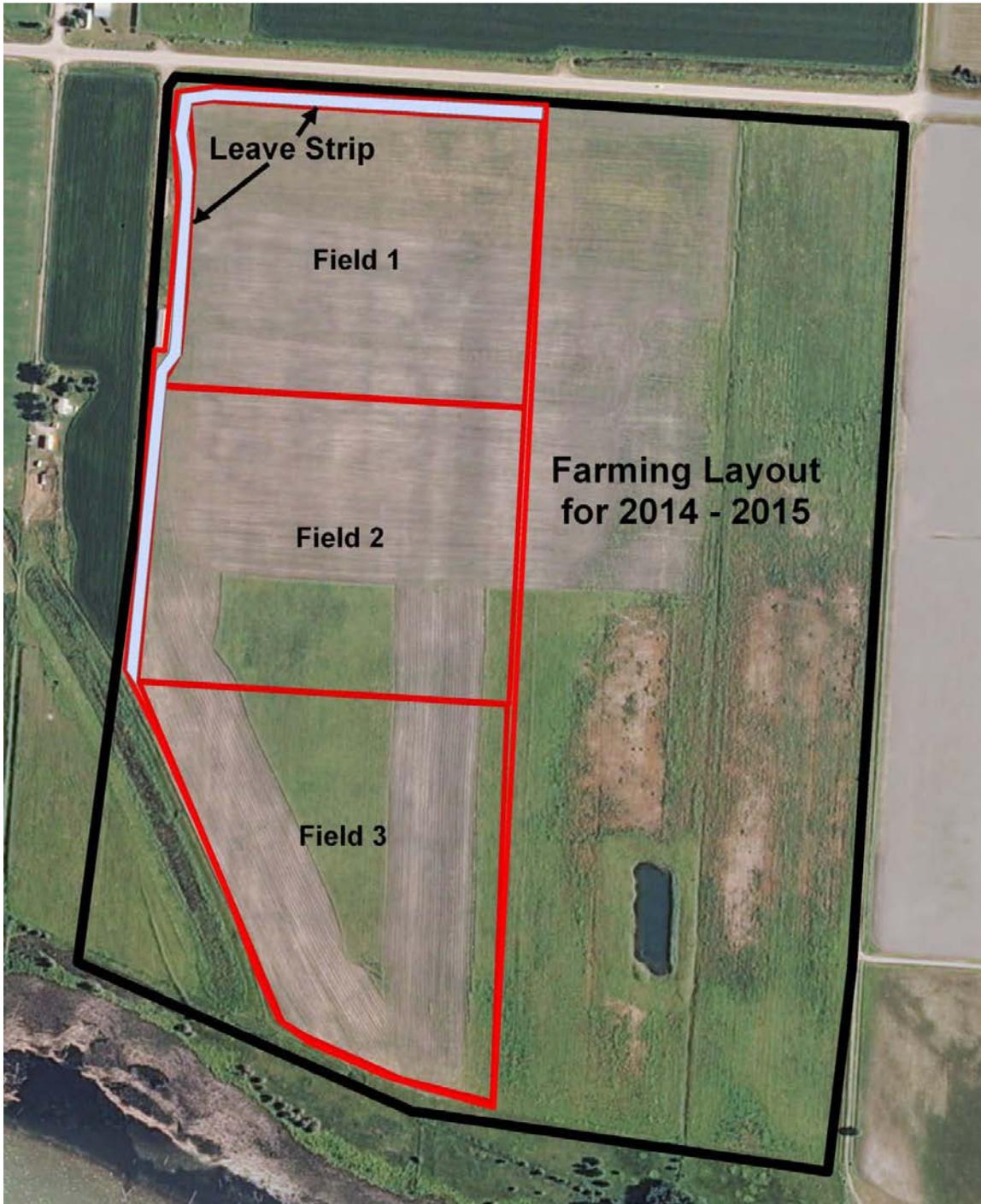
Chris Hammond, FWP Wildlife Biologist, Kalispell, MT  
Jessy Coltrane, FWP Area Wildlife Biologist, Kalispell, MT  
Alan Wood, FWP Wildlife Mitigation Coordinator, MT  
Kris Tempel, FWP Fisheries Technician, Kalispell, MT

### **3. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:**

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
Parks Division  
Wildlife Division  
Fisheries Division

Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) was consulted on the original EAs for the acquisition of these two properties which included the proposal to continue these farming operations.

**Attachment A: North Shore State Park/WMA property map.**



**Attachment B. North Shore WMA property**

