Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region 2 Headquarters
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804
Phone 406-542-5500

November 12, 2015

Dear Interested Citizen:

Enclosed you will find for your review the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for a Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposal to acquire fee title to 760 acres from The Nature Conservancy, as an addition to FWP's adjacent 740-acre Nevada Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA), located southeast of Helmville in Powell County. This property would add to the elk and deer winter range of the WMA, increase access to surrounding public lands, and is a critical property for large-scale wildlife connectivity. A draft environmental assessment (EA) has been prepared describing this proposal.

FWP will hold a public hearing in Helmville on Thursday, November 19 at 6:30 p.m. at the Helmville Community Center (201 S Main St [Hwy 271], Helmville) to discuss the proposal, answer questions, and take public comment.

The EA may be obtained by mail from Region 2 FWP, 3201 Spurgin Rd., Missoula 59804; by phoning 406-542-5540; by emailing shrose@mt.gov; or by viewing FWP's Internet website http://fwp.mt.gov ("Public Notices," beginning November 12).

Comments may be made on FWP's website (webpage above) or may be directed to Sharon Rose at the mail, phone or email addresses above. Comments must be received by FWP no later than December 11, 2015. (We have extended the original December 9th deadline due to delay in getting the EA posted on FWP's website.)

As part of the decision making process under MEPA, I expect to issue the Decision Notice for this EA soon after the end of the comment period. The Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission has the final decision-making authority for FWP land acquisition proposals, and the Commission will be asked to render its decision on this proposal at its January 2016 meeting in Helena. Approval will also be necessary from the Montana Board of Land Commissioners.

Sincerely,

/s/ Randy Arnold

Randy Arnold
Regional Supervisor

RA/sr

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Draft Environmental Assessment

Proposed Clear Creek Addition
to the Nevada Creek Wildlife Management Area

November 2015

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Region 2 Office
3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804
Phone 406-542-5500

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1. Draft Management Plan, Proposed Clear Creek Addition to the Nevada Lake WMA
2. Forest Stewardship Plan for the Clear Creek Addition to Nevada Lake WMA

1. PURPOSE AND NEED

1.1 Purposed Action and Need

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) purposes to purchase in fee title, two parcels totaling 760 acres that are currently owned by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The parcels, known as the (proposed) Clear Creek addition, are southeast of Helmville in Powell County and lie north of Nevada Creek Reservoir on the north side of Montana Highway 141. One parcel is directly adjacent to the west and the other is directly Clear Creek addition parcel is bisected by Chicken Creek (Figure 1).

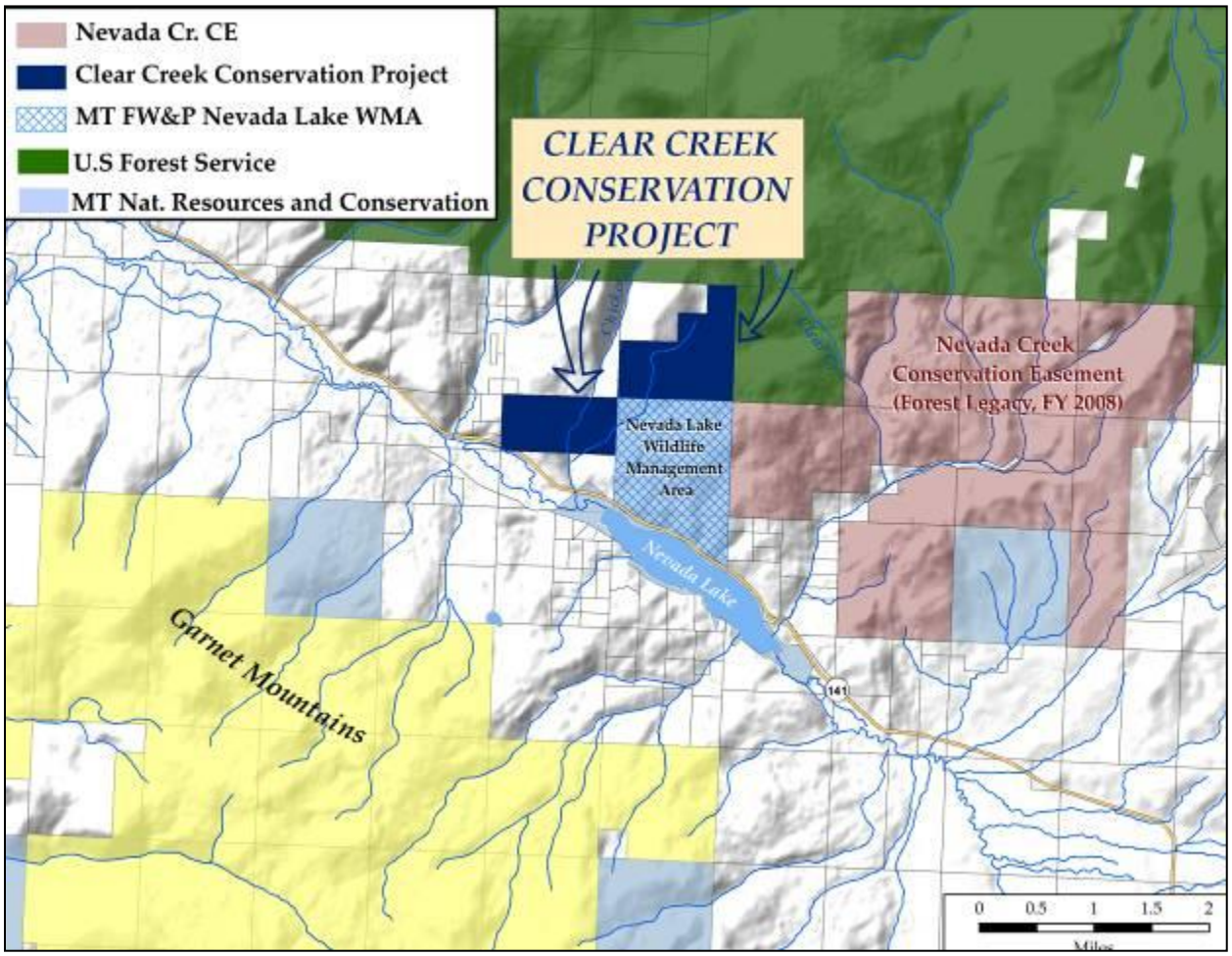

Figure 1. Location of the proposed Clear Creek addition (2 parcels) adjacent to the Nevada Lake WMA.

Wildlife habitat and fisheries values are abundant on the properties, and the area experiences high use from hunters during the general deer and elk season. The Clear Creek addition would conserve and expand critical winter range for deer and elk adjacent to the Nevada Lake WMA. Grizzly bears frequent the area, and Chicken Creek has been identified as a very important tributary for native westslope cutthroat trout.

The Clear Creek addition is situated in an area important for wintering deer and elk that lie within deer and elk Hunting District (HD) 293. Each year HD 293 experiences >20,000 elk hunter-days and >15,000 deer hunter-days.

Funding for this project has been secured through the Forest Legacy Program and matched by donation of land value from TNC and additional dollars from the Habitat Montana Conservation Program.

1.2 Objectives of the Proposed Action

- To protect and enhance critical habitat for sensitive wildlife species;
- To protect and enhance habitat for a wide variety of game species;
- To preserve terrestrial wildlife habitat and movement corridors between the Bob Marshall/ Scapegoat wildland complexes and the East Garnet mountain range, for the benefit of game and nongame species;
- To protect and enhance cold, clean, connected and complex native salmonid habitat critical to westslope cutthroat trout and other important aquatic species within the Nevada Creek drainage of the Blackfoot River watershed;
- To provide managed public access to the property and adjacent state and federal lands for hunting, angling, hiking, camping, and other recreational activities; and
- To protect important forest areas that are threatened by potential conversion to non-forest uses, and therefore also protect scenic, cultural, fish, wildlife, and area recreation resources as well as riparian areas.

1.3 Location

The Clear Creek addition lies approximately 8 miles southeast of the community of Helmville, Montana.

Legal Description (general terms):

Powell County: T12N, R10W, section 11: the northern half;
Section 1: the southern half, the southern half of the NE corner, and the NE corner of the NE corner.

1.4 Application to FWP Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Management Strategy

The proposed Clear Creek addition lies within one of the aquatic conservation focus areas in greatest need of protection, as identified in FWP's Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Conservation Strategy (CFWCS, FWP 2005[1]). The *Blackfoot River Focus Area* in the CFWCS begins at the junction of Beartrap and Anaconda creeks near the Continental Divide and flows 132 miles west to its mouth at Bonner, Montana. There are 23 aquatic species found within this focus area, including the federally listed bull trout (Threatened, under the US Endangered Species Act) and the Montana Species of Concern (SOC) westslope cutthroat trout (Tier 1) and western pearlshell mussel (Tier 2).

The Clear Creek addition is situated within the Nevada Creek drainage and north of Nevada Lake Reservoir. The landscape is characterized by ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) forest with sagebrush (*Artemesia tridentata*) and rough fescue (*Festuca campestris*) native grasslands intermixed. Sagebrush and native grassland ecosystems serve as important winter range for deer and elk.

The unique diversity of these cover types provides habitats potentially supporting 183 wildlife species within the proposed WMA. Appendix A lists the CFWCS Tier 1 wildlife species and Species of Concern that are predicted to occur on or in the vicinity of the property. Evaluation of current habitat conditions

[1] Available at http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/conservationInAction/fullplan.html Accessed 9 Nov 2015.

within the Nevada Lake WMA property and the probability of occurrence of sensitive species are noted under comments.

1.5 Authority

FWP has the authority to purchase lands that are suitable for game, bird, fish or fur-bearing animal restoration, propagation or protection; for public hunting, fishing, or trapping areas; and for state parks and outdoor recreation per state statute section (§) 87-1-209, Montana Code Annotated (MCA).

Per state law, § 87-1-201(9) MCA, FWP is required to contribute to a special revenue account called the forest management account to be used to address fire mitigation, pine beetle infestation, and wildlife habitat enhancement, giving priority to forested lands in excess of 50 contiguous acres in any state park, fishing access site, or wildlife management area under the department's jurisdiction.

FWP is also required to establish a maintenance account for property acquisition involving more than 100 acres or $100,000 in value (§§ 87-1-209 and 23-1-127(2), MCA). Such an account would be used for weed maintenance, fence installation or repair of existing fences, garbage removal, implementation of safety and health measures required by law to protect the public, erosion control, streambank stabilization, erection of barriers to preserve riparian vegetation and habitat, and planting of native trees, grasses, and shrubs for habitat stabilization. Such maintenance activities should be consistent with the good neighbor policy (§ 23-1-126, MCA).

Additionally, § 23-2-101, MCA, provides authority for the proposed purchase: "Montana is uniquely endowed with scenic landscapes and areas rich in recreational value. This outdoor heritage enriches the lives of citizens, attracts new residents and businesses to the state, and is of major significance to the expanding tourist industry. It is the purpose of this part to give authority to the department of fish, wildlife, and parks to plan and develop outdoor recreational resources in the state, which authority shall permit receiving and expending funds including federal grants for this purpose."

2. ALTERNATIVES

2.1 Alternative A--Proposed Action: FWP would purchase the 760 acres of fee-title land from The Nature Conservancy, as the Clear Creek addition to the Nevada Lake WMA.

FWP proposes to acquire 760 acres of fee title land from The Nature Conservancy for the protection and enhancement of valuable wildlife habitat for elk, deer, and other species. The Clear Creek property would be an addition to the existing Nevada Lake WMA and provide hunter access to surrounding public lands.

The property is currently owned by TNC which purchased this property in 2003 as part of the larger Blackfoot Community Project, with the intent to divest the property through sale to private and public conservation entities. FWP approached TNC with a desire to purchase the Clear Creek parcels to protect wildlife habitat and add to the WMA. Funding for the purchase was secured through the US Forest Service, Forest Legacy Program in 2014.

FWP has drafted an interim management plan for the Clear Creek addition, which is Attachment 1 to this EA. The interim management plan would direct FWP management of the WMA until habitat assessments, infrastructure inventories, and public scoping are completed. A comprehensive management plan would be drafted when more complete data are available. A forest stewardship plan for the Clear Creek addition has also been completed; it is Attachment 2 to this EA.

FWP has ordered an appraisal for the proposed Clear Creek Addition, but that information is not available as of the date of this EA. FWP would pay 75% of the appraised value, but no more than $598,500 total. TNC has generously committed to donate the remainder of the appraisal price.

2.2 Alternative B--No Action: FWP would not purchase the Clear Creek addition

Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not acquire the 760-acre property. TNC would continue to search for an alternate private or public buyer for the land.

3. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

3.1 Land Use

Prior to the purchase of the property by TNC, the Clear Creek addition belonged to Plum Creek Timber Company (PCTC) and was actively logged on a rotational basis. PCTC's long-term intent was to sell the land as private and/or development real estate. TNC purchased the land as part of the Blackfoot Community Project with the intention of restoring the land and selling it to a conservation buyer.

Most timbered stands on the property have been actively managed for timber production over the past 50 years and are in some stage of regeneration. Most of the roads on the subject property, which were originally established for timber harvesting, are currently closed to public wheeled-motorized use.

Public recreation had been allowed on the property by PCTC for many years. TNC continued to allow the same public access and has managed the property with restoration as the goal. Weed management has been the main focus of management and timber harvest has ceased on the property. The predominant recreational activities include hunting, trapping, and hiking. Roads are the only permanent developments present on the property.

Proposed Action: The Clear Creek addition would be included in the adjacent Nevada Lake WMA and would be managed consistent with that of other WMAs owned and managed by FWP. Typical management goals include but are not be limited to: weed management, forest management and timber harvest, stream and riparian enhancement/restoration, and recreational use. Upon acquisition, FWP would conduct a detailed vegetation (including timber) assessment, and a roads and water control-structure inventory; FWP would also solicit public input regarding future recreational use management. Timber management activities would be conducted to maintain and restore forest health and improve upland wildlife habitat with an emphasis on recruiting mature multi-storied stands, where appropriate.

There are no active grazing leases on the property and FWP does not anticipate introducing livestock grazing. FWP would install appropriate informational signage at the main access points to the property to communicate WMA property boundaries, FWP regulations, and general site information.

No Action: Under the No Action Alternative, TNC would continue to pursue other interested parties; if sold to another party, there would be no guarantee the land would be open to the public. Depending upon a buyer's plans for the property, land uses might revert to timber harvest, change to cattle grazing or remain unchanged from its current uses.

3.2 Vegetation

The Clear Creek lands are situated within the Nevada Creek drainage, north of Nevada Lake Reservoir. Elevations range between 4,000 and 4,800 feet. The landscape is characterized as a mosaic of forest and sagebrush-grasslands with ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*) and Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) forest and sagebrush (*Artemesia tridentata*) and rough fescue (*Festuca campestris*) grasslands intermixed. Stands of aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) and black cottonwood (*Populus trichocarpa*) are scattered

throughout the parcels. Rocky Mountain juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*) is also intermixed within the forest and grasslands. However, due to the loss of fire on the landscape, juniper and Douglas-fir have encroached on the sagebrush fescue grasslands. Sagebrush grassland ecosystems serve as important winter range for deer and elk, as well as for several Montana SOC that occupy the Nevada Lake WMA.

Proposed Action: FWP acquisition of the Clear Creek addition and its subsequent inclusion in the adjacent Nevada Lake WMA would prevent impacts from timber harvest within riparian corridors; eliminate associated effects of sedimentation, runoff, and rises in water temperature from removal of riparian vegetation; and provide opportunity for future riparian-corridor restoration activities. Regionally, riparian corridors are most threatened by residential development and industrial timber harvest activities. In addition, sagebrush-fescue grasslands would be treated relative to the threat of tree/shrub encroachment and managed for retention of the grasslands.

Fire suppression on the addition would fall under the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation's (DNRC) fire protection jurisdiction. Wildfires would be immediately suppressed upon detection. In an attempt to prevent human-caused ignitions, FWP may institute temporary measures (such as progressively restricting open campfires and public access to the property) if and as summer-fall fire danger intensifies in some years.

Areas within the parcels have infestations of spotted knapweed and hound's tongue. FWP has received Powell County's weed inspection, per § 7-22-2154(1), MCA, which requires nonfederal government agencies to obtain a weed inspection by the county weed district. FWP would be required to develop a weed management plan to ensure compliance with district noxious weed management programs. This weed management plan has not been completed, but in the interim FWP would implement its 2008 *Statewide Integrated Noxious Weed Management Plan*[2] on the Clear Creek addition.

FWP anticipates a decrease in noxious weeds and an improvement in overall habitat health following the plan's implementation. FWP would actively treat weeds through the use of herbicides and biological control agents. As an additional preventive measure, FWP would confine wheeled-motorized travel to the previously demarcated parking area for Nevada Lake WMA (Figure 2) and would otherwise avoid unnecessary disturbance of the soil surface.

No Action: If FWP does not purchase the property, critical aquatic and terrestrial habitat may not be conserved, the property may be sold privately and public access to and through the property may be lost, and the existing conifer forest and riparian areas could be disrupted by development or management activities. It is difficult to predict the extent new ownership would affect existing vegetation and wildlife habitat resources since potential future landowner activities are unknown, but FWP anticipates the land would not be managed for fish and wildlife habitat.

3.3 Wildlife Species

The Nevada Lake WMA provides habitat for more than 28 Montana Species of Concern (Appendix A) and over 184 other native species including elk, white-tailed and mule deer, moose, and a variety of nongame birds and mammals, as well as critical habitat for grizzly bear. The Clear Creek addition lies within a matrix of protected state and federal lands as well as some private lands with conservation easements, and it is within an important linkage zone for grizzly bear and Canada lynx.

[2] Document available at (and accessed 9 Nov 2015) http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/habitat/noxiousWeeds/ ; click on "Montana Weed Management Plan."

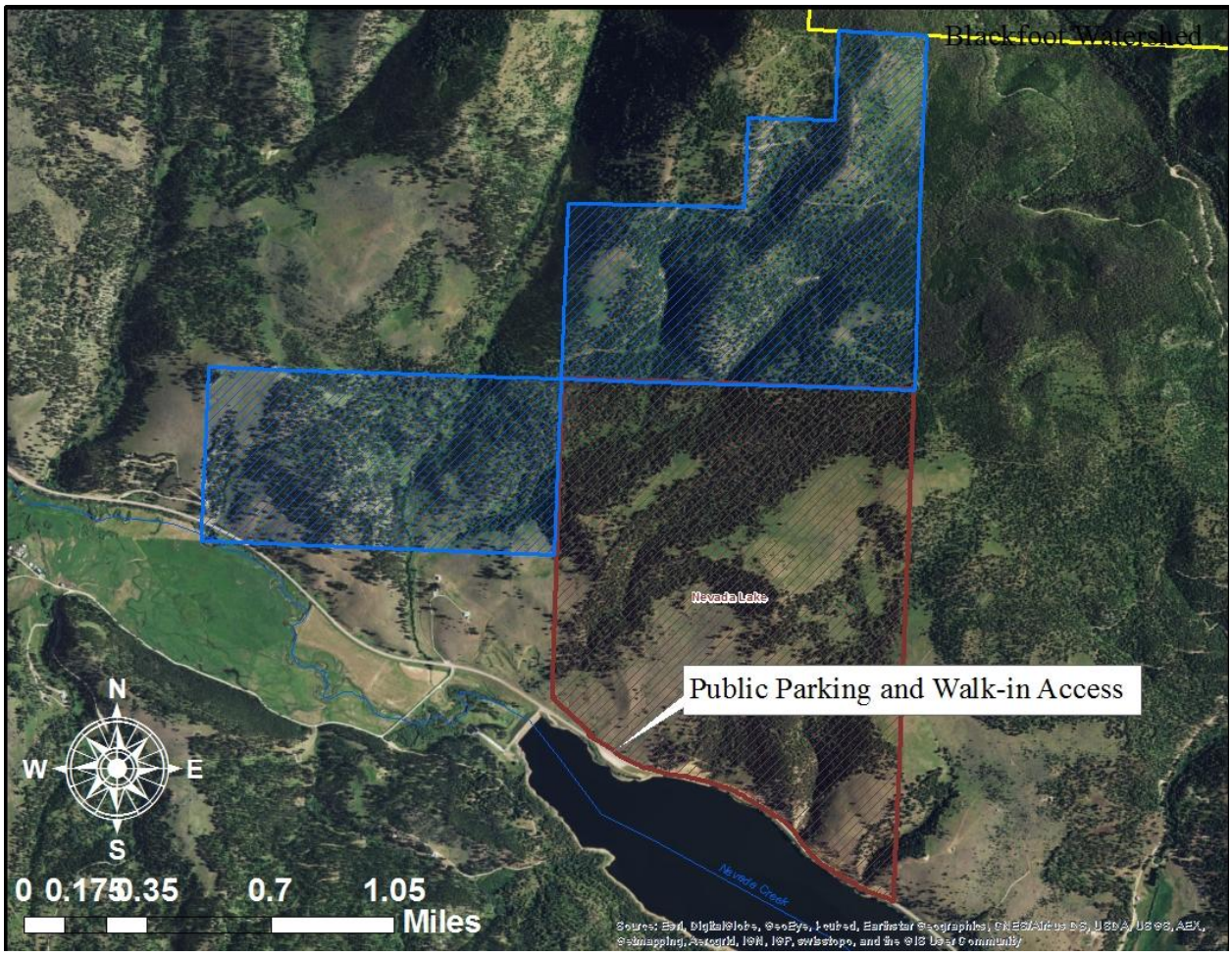

Figure 2. Location of the public parking area and main access point for Nevada Lake WMA.

Game Species
Elk use the proposed addition year-round, and it supports important populations of mule deer, white-tailed deer, moose, black bear, mountain lion, wolf, and mountain grouse. The property lies within deer/elk HD 293, which supports 15,000 to 20,000 hunter-days annually depending upon the ungulate species.

Canada Lynx
Prior to its listing as a federally Threatened species in 2000, very little was known about the US distribution and ecology of the Canada lynx. Over the last decade, the US Forest Service's (USFS) Rocky Mountain Research Station has coordinated a Canada lynx research program intended to define the species' distribution, collect ecological data, and develop predictive habitat models for the species. Research findings indicate that lynx in the Rocky Mountains now occur in only a few remaining areas. One of those areas is the Bob Marshall Wilderness complex and the Dalton and Nevada/Ogden Mountain ecosystem to the north of the subject property and to the immediate south within the Garnet Mountain Range (Figure 3).

Grizzly Bear
Much of the existing Nevada Lake WMA and proposed Clear Creek addition is within the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Recovery Area and Zone 1 of the Draft Grizzly Bear

Conservation Strategy. Grizzlies heavily use the subject parcel for foraging post-emergence through fall. FWP data indicate particularly high use of the project area's riparian corridors and abundant serviceberry, chokecherry, and hawthorn present in forest openings and regenerating harvest units. The parcels of interest lie within a recognized and highly important grizzly bear linkage zone (Figure 3).

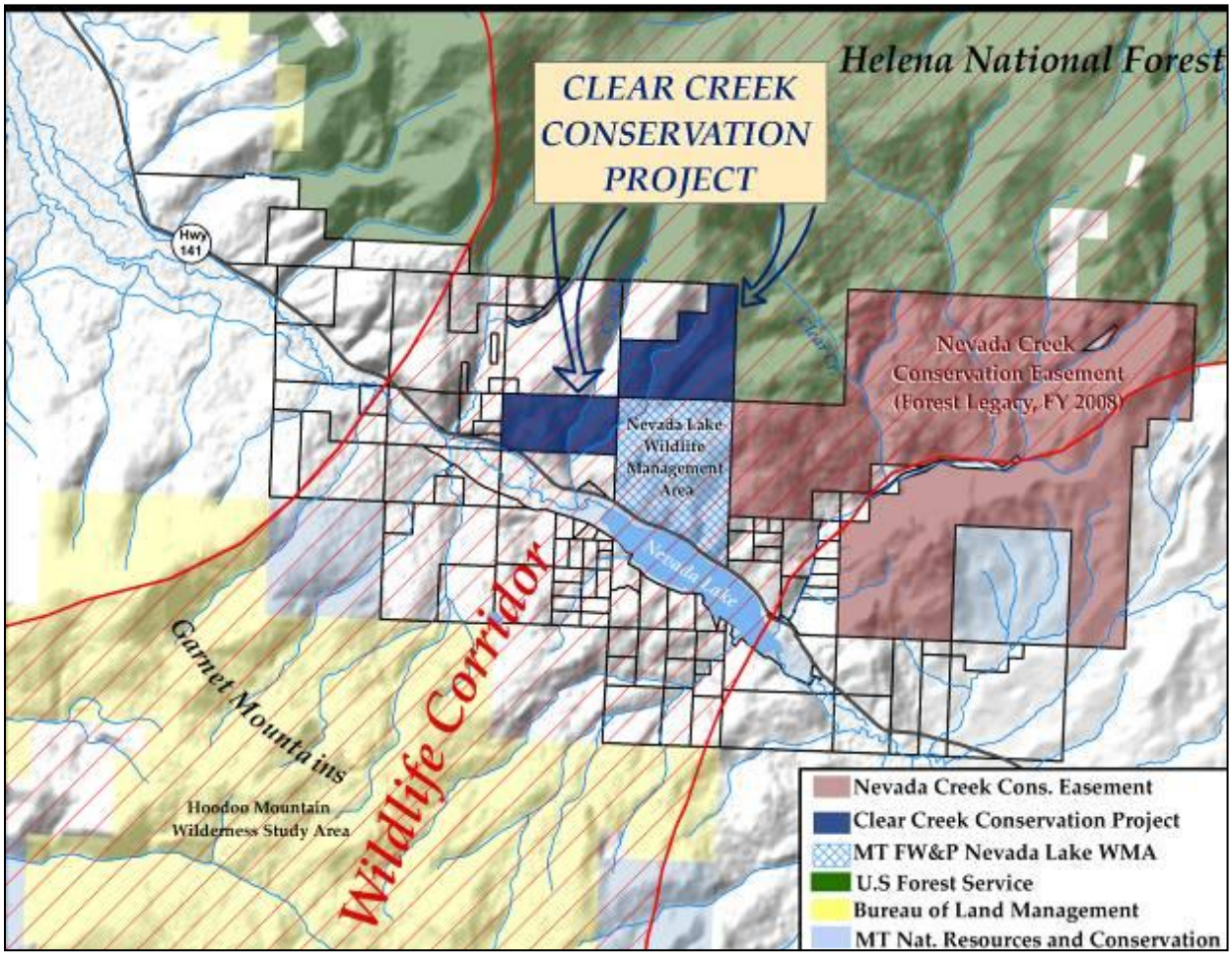

Figure 3. Wildlife corridor connecting the Bob Marshall/Scapegoat Wilderness Areas to the north and the Nevada/Ogden and Divide Roadless area to the near north of the proposed Clear Creek addition, with the Garnet Mountain Range and the BLM Hoodoo Mountain Wilderness Study Area.

Other Species

Approximately 184 terrestrial wildlife species have been documented in or near the proposed addition, not including water birds associated with the nearby Nevada Reservoir (Appendix A). These include 3 amphibian, 131 bird, 47 mammal, and 3 reptile species. The large diversity of species for such a small area is due to the variety of habitats (riparian, conifer forest, grassland, sagebrush) within a small geographic area. Riparian habitats are especially important for supporting species diversity, relative to their rarity on the landscape. Additional species could potentially be detected with more extensive surveys. There are also a large variety of plant and invertebrate animal species potentially associated with the property, which are important components of the ecosystem.

Many wildlife species have been negatively impacted by human activities, especially from habitat fragmentation and loss of connectivity. The Clear Creek addition would help strengthen connectivity between the USFS lands and the existing WMA. Forest management of the property has been more intensive than adjacent and nearby USFS lands. Future management can include better coordination between FWP and the USFS, to help manage the area within the context of the larger landscape.

Species of Concern

Species of Concern[3] (SOC) and Potential Species of Concern (PSOC) that have been documented in the vicinity of the property in similar habitats are listed in Table 1. Long-term management to maintain or improve certain habitats used by SOC and PSOC would help contribute to maintaining or enhancing these species' populations, with the goal of preventing population declines that could lead to Federal listing (as Endangered or Threatened species). SOC and PSOC include 11 mammal, 18 bird, and 1 amphibian species.

The property supports a variety of forest types, riparian and wetland habitats, and some sagebrush-grasslands. Long-term management strategies that would benefit several SOC and PSOC would include protecting existing snags and large-diameter live trees, managing forested habitats to protect and encourage growth of large-diameter trees, protection and enhancement of riparian habitats, and protecting the limited sagebrush-grasslands from conifer encroachment, fire, and weeds.

Proposed Action: FWP acquisition of the property would protect and enhance riparian corridors important to migratory songbirds, small mammals, amphibians, and fish (fish species are described in Section 3.4). Any anticipated forest management projects would be aimed at enhancing conditions for wildlife by mimicking natural disturbance regimes. These practices include retaining appropriate snag densities, maintaining intermountain grassland patches, and managing for long-term uneven-aged forest stands (Attachment 2). Furthermore, FWP would maintain current hunting, trapping, snowmobiling, and wildlife viewing opportunities. Because these activities have already been occurring, no new impacts to wildlife species are anticipated (Attachment 1).

This proposed addition would ensure the protection of important habitat that could contribute to the continued occupancy and recovery of several imperiled terrestrial wildlife species including wide-ranging native carnivores such as grizzly bear, Canada lynx, wolverine, and fisher. FWP acquisition of the property would help ensure connectivity and the biological effectiveness of the nearby Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness areas, and Garnet Mountain ranges. The property is also within a linkage zone identified as one of the crucial connections within the Yellowstone-to-Yukon corridor essential to maintaining the genetic viability of grizzly bears within and between the US and Canada.

No Action: If FWP does not purchase the Clear Creek addition, critical habitat for many game and nongame wildlife species could be diminished or lost, an important corridor between the Bob Marshall/Scapegoat and Garnet Mountain Range could be compromised, and the subject lands would be expected to be at greater long-term risk of subdivision or development.

If TNC were to sell the property to another buyer, risks of loss of habitat and public access are unknown; future resource management and the possible provision of public access would be dependent on the desires of the new property owner(s). Important wildlife habitat and public access would be expected to be diminished or lost.

[3] A native animal breeding in Montana that is considered to be "at risk" due to declining population trends, threats to its habitats, and/or restricted distribution. The purpose of Montana's SOC listing is to highlight species in decline and encourage conservation efforts to reverse population declines and prevent the need for future listing as Threatened or Endangered Species under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

Table 1. Species of Concern and Potential Species of Concern documented in vicinity of the Clear Creek addition in similar habitats.

Species Group	Common Name	*Scientific Name*	Species of Concern*	Comments
Mammals	Canada Lynx	*Lynx canadensis*	SOC	Potential habitat, likely more transient on property
Mammals	Fisher	*Martes pennanti*	SOC	Old trapping records, 1990's-2001
Mammals	Fringed Myotis	*Myotis thysanodes*	SOC	Suitable habitat, likely present, open conifer forest & riparian habitat
Mammals	Grizzly Bear	*Ursus arctos*	SOC	Habitat generalist, documented sightings on property.
Mammals	Hoary Bat	*Lasiurus cinereus*	SOC	Suitable habitat, likely present
Mammals	Little Brown Myotis	*Myotis lucifugus*	SOC	Foraging & roosting habitat present, especially large snags
Mammals	Porcupine	*Erethizon dorsatum*	PSOC	Forested habitat
Mammals	Silver-haired Bat	*Lasionycteris noctivagans*	PSOC	Foraging & roosting habitat present, especially large snags
Mammals	Townsend's Big-eared Bat	*Corynorhinus townsendii*	SOC	Foraging habitat present, no known roosting habitat
Mammals	Wolverine	*Gulo gulo*	SOC	Potential habitat, likely more transient on property
Mammals	Yuma Myotis	*Myotis yumanensis*	PSOC	Potential roosting habitat in large trees
Birds	Bald Eagle	*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*	SSS	Potential roosting or nesting habitat in large trees
Birds	Black-backed Woodpecker	*Picoides arcticus*	SOC	May use bug-killed trees, in addition to burned trees
Birds	Brewer's Sparrow	*Spizella breweri*	SOC	Some sagebrush habitat on property, may or may not be suitable
Birds	Brown Creeper	*Certhia americana*	SOC	Mesic old-growth forest along drainages
Birds	Cassin's Finch	*Haemorhous cassinii*	SOC	Open ponderosa pine forests
Birds	Clark's Nutcracker	*Nucifraga columbiana*	SOC	Mixed conifer forest, propety may be more suitable for foraging
Birds	Evening Grosbeak	*Coccothraustes vespertinus*	SOC	Mixed conifer and spruce-fir forest
Birds	Flammulated Owl	*Psiloscops flammeolus*	SOC	Mature mixed conifer forest
Birds	Golden Eagle	*Aquila chrysaetos*	SOC	Conifer trees used for nesting, grasslands for foraging
Birds	Great Gray Owl	*Strix nebulosa*	SOC	Mixed conifer forest, especially with aspen stands
Birds	Lewis's Woodpecker	*Melanerpes lewis*	SOC	Open conifer and riparian forest, more likely to be transient on property
Birds	Long-billed Curlew	*Numenius americanus*	SOC	Grasslands, sagebrush-grasslands
Birds	Northern Goshawk	*Accipiter gentilis*	SOC	Mature mixed conifer forest
Birds	Pacific Wren	*Troglodytes pacificus*	SOC	Mature mixed conifer forest, especially along drainages
Birds	Pileated Woodpecker	*Dryocopus pileatus*	SOC	Mature mixed conifer forest
Birds	Rufous Hummingbird	*Selasphorus rufus*	PSOC	Second growth & mature forests, especially north-facing slopes in this area
Birds	Varied Thrush	*Ixoreus naevius*	SOC	Mesic old-growth forest along drainages
Birds	Veery	*Catharus fuscescens*	SOC	Riparian habitat, especially around springs
Amphibians	Western Toad	*Anaxyrus boreas*	SOC	Upland habitat available, no known breeding habitat on property.
Fish	Bull Trout	*Salvelinus confluentus*	SOC	Not present in the project lands but qualifies as potential habitat with significant populations downstream in Nevada Creek.
Fish	Westslope Cutthroat Trout	*Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi*	SOC	Present in Chicken and Clear Creeks.
Invertebrates	Western Pearlshell	*Margaritifera falcata*	SOC	

*Code definitions can be found at: http://fieldguide.mt.gov/statusCodes.aspx#soc

3.4 Fisheries and Aquatic Resources

The Nevada Creek reservoir, creek, and tributary system provides habitat for the complete life cycle of many native aquatic species, including self-sustaining populations of imperiled native westslope cutthroat trout (WSCT), a Montana SOC, and western pearlshell mussel, also an SOC.

Clear Creek is a 2nd order tributary entering Buffalo Gulch flowing through the Helena National Forest directly adjacent to the Clear Creek addition Lands. Clear Creek is described as moderately entrenched (B3 – B4-type) with gradients of 2-4%, supporting a Douglas-fir/Engelmann spruce forest above a red-osier/dogwood shrub layer with fern/moss undergrowth. Riparian communities appear healthy with communities of willow, hawthorn, and alder, with a bulrush, grass, and forb undergrowth. WSCT are present in all reaches of Clear Creek and exhibit a very high level of genetic purity (~ 97%).

Chicken Creek is a small 1st order tributary stream that enters Nevada Creek just below the Nevada Creek Reservoir (a.k.a., Nevada Lake). WSCT persist in all stretches of Chicken Creek at low to moderate levels. Riparian conditions are poor in the upper reaches of the stream, where the impacts of unregulated livestock grazing in the riparian zone are evident. Most of the vegetation is denuded and bank integrity is compromised as a result. Lower reaches are in moderate condition with degraded vegetation and limited habitat for WSCT.

Western Pearlshell

The western pearlshell is a native freshwater mussel species that inhabits coldwater streams on both sides of the continental divide. This species is typically found in trout streams and rivers, particularly in drainages where the WSCT (its native fish host) also occurs. The distribution and abundance of this species has declined dramatically in Montana over the past century, and it is a Species of Concern.

Proposed Action: FWP acquisition of the subject property would protect more than 0.5 miles of native fish-bearing water in Chicken Creek, a 1nd order tributary of Nevada Creek.

Acquisition would further leverage ongoing partners' work adjacent to subject lands. This acquisition would complement ongoing efforts to ensure WSCT persistence and recovery within the Blackfoot River watershed. FWP's purchase of the property would ensure no further degradation to fisheries habitat and riparian areas would occur. Two stock water rights (76F 116190 00, 76F 116191 00) exist with the property and would be transferred with the property to FWP.

No Action: If FWP does not purchase the property, it is unknown how fisheries and water resources (riparian areas, wetlands) would be affected by another buyer's future management after TNC sells the property.

Habitat fragmentation, alterations, and degradation associated with development and non-sustainable natural resource extraction are major threats to native salmonids. Potentially divergent, uncoordinated, and inconsistent management of fisheries and water resources could occur if the property were to be subdivided or developed; this would be expected to adversely impact the watershed's outstanding natural resource values and imperiled species, including native WSCT. Variable timber harvest practices, invasive species, new road construction, and culverts and stream crossings are examples of actions that could diminish riparian and coniferous vegetation and increase surface disturbance, resulting in elevated water temperatures, sedimentation, and runoff. It is possible numerous ongoing (and future) native trout restoration activities in Nevada Creek could be jeopardized if the property were sold to a non-conservation minded entity.

3.5 Aesthetics and Recreation Opportunities

TNC has historically allowed public access to lands subject to this proposal. Public recreational opportunities include but are not limited to fishing, hunting, bird watching, hiking, horseback riding, dog-sledding, and cross-country skiing.

Hunting is an especially important public use of the subject lands and is the primary means for balancing elk and deer herds with forage resources and landowner tolerance of those species. Elk hunting is of particular importance to the local economy through sales of lodging, equipment, and guide services. The land is within HD 293, which supports over 20,000 elk hunter-days and over 15,000 deer hunter-days annually.

Motorized use is not currently allowed on the Nevada Lake WMA.

Proposed Action: Under the proposed action, FWP would purchase the property and current public access and recreational opportunities would be maintained.

The parcels would remain open to public hunting and would continue to be managed under the standard deer/elk regulations for HD 293. No Nevada Lake WMA-specific permits or licenses are anticipated.

Camping would be permitted year-round but limited to a 14-day maximum stay, and fire restrictions may be implemented as wildfire risk dictates. Parking for camping or other recreation activities would be restricted to established parking area (Figure 2).

Recreation would be managed in accordance with applicable FWP rules and regulations, including FWP's Commercial Use Rules. Commercial outfitting would not be permitted on the addition, and it is not allowed on the existing WMA. FWP would install appropriate boundary and regulation signage and additional site information would be available via brochures and the FWP website to inform the public of the allowable activities within the WMA.

No Action: If FWP does not purchase this land and if it were sold to another buyer, free public access to and through the property for existing recreation activities could be restricted, altered or lost. Future public recreation opportunities under a different ownership are difficult to analyze, since future recreation management would be at the sole discretion of the owner(s).

3.6 Community and Taxes

In 2006, Powell County adopted an *Amended Growth Policy*[4]. Based on 2000 census results, the population size for the county was 7,180 with the town of Deer Lodge (3,421) accounting for 48% of the total population. However, Deer Lodge has experienced a decrease in overall growth (having 65% of the county's population in 1970, decreasing to 48% in 2000) while the rural portions of the county have experienced an increase in growth (35% in 1970, increasing to 52% in 2000). The most recent census in 2010 shows a slight decrease in county population size at 7,027 with an estimate for 2014 of 6,909.

In 2000, there were a total of 3,605 jobs across all industries within Powell County. Between 1980 and 2000 over 600 jobs were added to Powell County, with approximately one-third of those in government. Other sources of employment included agriculture and timber production, with an emphasis on natural resource related jobs.

[4] Available at (accessed 9 Nov 2015) http://www.powellcountymt.gov/janda/files/home/1352996723_GrowthPolicy102006.pdf

Timber markets are well established within the Clear Creek addition area with two local mills. Sun Mountain Lumber in Deerlodge (40 miles) employs 230 full-time workers and Pyramid Mountain Lumber in Seeley Lake (60 miles) has 110 full-time employees.

Proposed Action: Fee title purchase by FWP would help provide long-term protection of wildlife habitat in the Blackfoot watershed, maintain the open space and integrity of the land, enhance public recreation opportunities, and direct management of the property toward habitat improvement and recreational use. Because of the rural nature of Powell County's economy, no significant adverse effects are anticipated as a result of this purchase.

This purchase is not expected to reduce the tax revenues that Powell County collects on this property, under § 87-1-603, MCA. FWP is required by that statute to pay "to the county a sum equal to the amount of taxes that would be payable on county assessment of the property if it was taxable to a private citizen." The most recent taxes for 2014 on this property were $762.00 per year based on the most recent assessment.

The potential social and economic implications of purchase of the TNC property are also considered in the Socio-Economic Assessment (Appendix C).

No Action: If FWP does not purchase the Clear Creek addition and if the property were sold and potentially subdivided or developed, tax revenues paid to the County could be higher than current levels. But such increased tax revenue could also be offset by increased County expenditures to provide services associated with development and subdivision in a rural area. Predicting the final use of the property and exact tax consequences if owned by another party(s) is difficult to assess.

4. Resource Issues Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Analysis

The Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) provides for the identification and elimination from detailed study of issues, which are not significant or which have been covered by a prior environmental review, narrowing the discussion of these issues to a brief presentation of why they would not have a significant effect on the physical or human environment or providing a reference to their coverage elsewhere (ARM 12.2.434(d)). While these resources are important, they were either unaffected or mildly affected by the proposed action, or the effects could be adequately mitigated.

A few issues were found not to be significant to the decision and were eliminated from further detailed analysis.

4.1 Soils

A query of the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Soil Survey database of the property identified several soil types within its boundaries ranging from various gravelly and clay loams. The predominant type was Danvers clay loam and Winkler gravelly loam. The remaining soil types are present in lesser amounts. Slopes are moderate.

No new soil disturbing activities are planned for the Clear Creek addition. Any existing mineral rights held by the current landowner will transfer to FWP. A minerals report was prepared and the development of minerals on the land is so remote as to be negligible.

4.2 Air Quality

Under either the Action or the No Action alternative, there are unlikely to be changes to the ambient air quality since FWP does not plan any construction or development activities that could affect particulate levels and air quality.

4.3 Noise and Electrical Effects

Since TNC has been managing the property as open for public recreation activities, and FWP would have a similar management approach, the potential for changes in noise levels is expected to be minimal. The potential for changes in noise levels would most likely depend on FWP approaches to managing type, timing, and location of recreation activities.

Existing electrical structures and easements would not be affected by either alternative.

4.4 Risk and Health Hazards

As part of FWP's due diligence, the Department would complete a hazardous materials survey prior to the property's acquisition.

4.5 Cultural and Historical Resources

Per § 22-3-433, MCA, all state agencies are required to consult with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) on the identification and location of heritage properties on lands owned by the state that may be adversely impacted by a proposed action. SHPO has completed a cultural resource file search for the property and reported that there are "few previously conducted cultural inventories done in the [Clear Creek addition] areas" (Appendix B). SHPO further indicated that "as long as there will be no disturbance or alteration to structures over fifty years of age we feel that there is a low likelihood cultural properties will be impacted" and a "recommendation for a cultural resource inventory is unwarranted at this time."

Proposed Action: FWP's proposed acquisition would not directly affect any known cultural or historical resources, since the proposed action at this time is acquisition, which involves no disturbance or alteration to land. If future FWP actions were to be planned for the Clear Creek addition (e.g., timber harvest), FWP would then contact SHPO for guidance and possible site investigation.

No Action: If FWP does not purchase the Clear Creek addition, then potential sale and development of the property could diminish the cultural and historic character of lands, depending on the actions of the new owner(s).

4.6 Cumulative Impacts

Proposed Action: FWP would manage the property in perpetuity for the benefit of terrestrial and aquatic species and manage its forested landscape such that riparian corridors are enhanced, native grasslands are protected, forests are diversified for increased habitat values, and noxious weeds are controlled.

The proposed FWP purchase would permanently protect and conserve significant forested habitat in the Clearwater Valley and would help ensure the continued function of important wildlife movement corridors for wide-ranging wildlife such as Canada lynx, grizzly bear, and wolverine between the Bob Marshall/Scapegoat Wildernesses and the Garnet Range. Such connectivity is essential for the recovery

of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species and maintaining viability of numerous other species such as elk, black bear, and a myriad of nongame species.

Similarly, the long-term protection of a portion of Chicken Creek and its tributaries would contribute to the perpetuation of native trout populations in Nevada Creek and the larger Blackfoot River watershed. Any future fisheries restoration activities initiated by FWP to improve water quality and riparian areas for native trout population would have positive benefits for all aquatic species, as well as terrestrial species.

Maintaining year-round public access to the subject lands would continue to provide recreational opportunities (hunting, fishing, hiking, etc.) for the general public. Furthermore, preserving public access to and through the property would allow the public the opportunity to enjoy and recreate on adjacent state and federal lands.

Although FWP purchase of the property would reduce some potential for development or residential subdivision near Nevada Lake (Nevada Creek reservoir), this reduction would be minimal since other private property is still available in the area.

Appropriate management of timber would provide long-term benefits for riparian and grassland vegetation communities, fish and wildlife, and reduce the potential for severe or catastrophic wildfire on the property.

No Action: If FWP does not purchase the Clear Creek addition (i.e., no action taken), then critical habitat important for maintaining native wildlife and fish populations in the Nevada Creek drainage would be vulnerable to subdivision and residential development. Habitat fragmentation, alterations and degradation associated with development, and non-sustainable natural resource extraction are major threats to native wildlife and salmonids. Crucial habitat and wildlife movement corridors for threatened, endangered, and sensitive fish and wildlife species could be at risked or compromised under this alternative.

If the property were to be subdivided or developed, then potentially divergent, uncoordinated, or inconsistent management of water resources could result in impacts to the watershed's outstanding natural resource values. Variable timber harvest practices, dispersed residential septic systems, invasive species, new road construction, and culverts and stream crossings could diminish riparian and coniferous vegetation and increase surface disturbance, resulting in elevated water temperatures, sedimentation, and runoff, which could have long-term negative impacts on fishery populations and recruitment rates of native species.

The loss of public access to the property would be a considerable loss of public recreational opportunity and reduce the potential for active wildlife population management by FWP (e.g., by hunting) if new owners chose to reduce or prohibit historic recreational activities (e.g., hunting, hiking, camping, etc.). Traditional uses of adjacent public lands could be impacted as well, if new landowners were to close the properties to the public.

5.0 NEED FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required? No. Based upon the above assessment, which has identified few minor impacts from the proposed acquisition and subsequent management of the property by FWP, an EIS is not required and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of review.

6.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

6.1 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The public would be notified in the following manners to comment on this current EA, the proposed action and alternatives:

- Legal notice will be published twice each in these newspapers: *Blackfoot Valley Dispatch* (Lincoln), *Independent Record* (Helena), *Missoulian*, *Seeley Swan Pathfinder*, and *Silver State Post* (Deer Lodge).
- Public notice will be posted on FWP's webpage http://fwp.mt.gov ("News," then "Recent Public Notices"); the Draft EA will also be available on this webpage, along with the opportunity to submit comments online.
- A news release will be prepared and distributed to a standard list of media outlets interested in FWP Region 2 issues; this news release will also be posted on FWP's website http://fwp.mt.gov ("News," then "News Releases").
- Direct mailing or email notification to adjacent landowners and other interested parties (individuals, groups, agencies).

Copies of this draft EA may be obtained by mail from Region 2 FWP, 3201 Spurgin Rd., Missoula 59804; by phoning 406-542-5540; by emailing shrose@mt.gov; or by viewing FWP's Internet website http://fwp.mt.gov ("Public Notices," beginning November 12, 2015).

A public hearing to explain the proposal, answer questions and take public comment will be held by FWP on November 19 at 6:30 p.m. in the Helmville Community Center (201 S Main St [Hwy 271], Helmville).

This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope with no significant physical or human impacts and only minor impacts that can be mitigated.

6.2 Offices/Programs contacted or contributing to this document:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:
Wildlife Division, Fisheries Division, Lands Unit, Legal Unit, Strategic Planning & Data Services
Montana Natural Heritage Program
Montana State Historic Preservation Office
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
Powell County Offices

6.3 Duration of Comment Period

The public comment period would extend for thirty (30) days beginning November 12, 2015. C***omments must be received no later than December 11, 2015*** (not Dec. 9th as previously announced) and can be mailed to:

Region 2 FWP
Attn: Sharon Rose
3201 Spurgin Rd.
Missoula, MT 59804

Or phoned to 406-542-5540

Or emailed to: shrose@mt.gov

6.4 Anticipated Timeline of Events

Submission of Project to the FWP Commission	January 2016
Submission of Project to the Land Board	January 2016
Property Closing if Approved	Early 2016

7.0 EA PREPARATION

Scott Eggeman, FWP Wildlife Biologist, Ovando, MT
Ron Peirce, Regional Fisheries Biologist, Missoula, MT
Kristi Dubois, FWP Regional Non-game Wildlife Biologist, Missoula, MT
Mike Thompson, FWP Regional Wildlife Manager, Missoula, MT
Rebecca Cooper, FWP Technology Program Coordinator, Helena, MT

APPENDICES

A. CFWCS Tier 1 Wildlife Species
B. SHPO Letter
C. Socio-Economic Assessment

ATTACHMENTS *(see separate document files)*

1. Draft Management Plan for Proposed Clear Creek Addition to the Nevada Lake WMA
2. Forest Stewardship Plan for the Clear Creek Conservation Project

Appendix A. CFWCS[5] Tier 1 wildlife species documented in the vicinity of the property in similar habitats.

Species Group	Common Name	*Scientific Name*	Global Rank	State Rank	Species of Concern
Amphibians	Long-toed Salamander	*Ambystoma macrodactylum*	G5	S4	
Amphibians	Western Toad	*Anaxyrus boreas*	G4	S2	SOC
Amphibians	Columbia Spotted Frog	*Rana luteiventris*	G4	S4	
Birds	Turkey Vulture	*Cathartes aura*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Bald Eagle	*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*	G5	S4	SSS
Birds	Northern Harrier	*Circus cyaneus*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Sharp-shinned Hawk	*Accipiter striatus*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Cooper's Hawk	*Accipiter cooperii*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Northern Goshawk	*Accipiter gentilis*	G5	S3	SOC
Birds	Red-tailed Hawk	*Buteo jamaicensis*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Rough-legged Hawk	*Buteo lagopus*	G5	S5N	
Birds	Golden Eagle	*Aquila chrysaetos*	G5	S3	SOC
Birds	American Kestrel	*Falco sparverius*	G5	S5	
Birds	Merlin	*Falco columbarius*	G5	S4	
Birds	Peregrine Falcon	*Falco peregrinus*	G4	S3	SOC
Birds	Prairie Falcon	*Falco mexicanus*	G5	S4	
Birds	Spruce Grouse	*Falcipennis canadensis*	G5	S4	
Birds	Dusky Grouse	*Dendragapus obscurus*	G5	S4	
Birds	Ruffed Grouse	*Bonasa umbellus*	G5	S4	
Birds	Wild Turkey	*Meleagris gallopavo*	G5	SNA	
Birds	Long-billed Curlew	*Numenius americanus*	G5	S3B	SOC
Birds	Wilson's Snipe	*Gallinago delicata*	G5	S5	
Birds	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia*	G5	SNA	
Birds	Mourning Dove	*Zenaida macroura*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Flammulated Owl	*Psiloscops flammeolus*	G4	S3B	SOC
Birds	Great Horned Owl	*Bubo virginianus*	G5	S5	
Birds	Northern Pygmy-Owl	*Glaucidium gnoma*	G4G5	S4	
Birds	Barred Owl	*Strix varia*	G5	S4	
Birds	Great Gray Owl	*Strix nebulosa*	G5	S3	SOC
Birds	Northern Saw-whet Owl	*Aegolius acadicus*	G5	S4	
Birds	Common Nighthawk	*Chordeiles minor*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Vaux's Swift	*Chaetura vauxi*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Calliope Hummingbird	*Selasphorus calliope*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Rufous Hummingbird	*Selasphorus rufus*	G5	S4B	PSOC
Birds	Belted Kingfisher	*Megaceryle alcyon*	G5	S5B	

[5] Montana's 2005 Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Conservation Strategy. Available at (and accessed 9 Nov 2015): http://fwp.mt.gov/fishAndWildlife/conservationInAction/fullplan.html

Species Group	Common Name	*Scientific Name*	Global Rank	State Rank	Species of Concern
Birds	Lewis's Woodpecker	*Melanerpes lewis*	G4	S2B	SOC
Birds	Williamson's Sapsucker	*Sphyrapicus thyroideus*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Red-naped Sapsucker	*Sphyrapicus nuchalis*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Downy Woodpecker	*Picoides pubescens*	G5	S5	
Birds	Hairy Woodpecker	*Picoides villosus*	G5	S5	
Birds	Black-backed Woodpecker	*Picoides arcticus*	G5	S3	SOC
Birds	American Three-toed Woodpecker	*Picoides dorsalis*	G5	S4	
Birds	Northern Flicker	*Colaptes auratus*	G5	S5	
Birds	Pileated Woodpecker	*Dryocopus pileatus*	G5	S3	SOC
Birds	Olive-sided Flycatcher	*Contopus cooperi*	G4	S4B	
Birds	Western Wood-Pewee	*Contopus sordidulus*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Willow Flycatcher	*Empidonax traillii*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Least Flycatcher	*Empidonax minimus*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Hammond's Flycatcher	*Empidonax hammondii*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Dusky Flycatcher	*Empidonax oberholseri*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Cordilleran Flycatcher	*Empidonax occidentalis*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Eastern Kingbird	*Tyrannus tyrannus*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Tree Swallow	*Tachycineta bicolor*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Violet-green Swallow	*Tachycineta thalassina*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Bank Swallow	*Riparia riparia*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Cliff Swallow	*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Gray Jay	*Perisoreus canadensis*	G5	S5	
Birds	Steller's Jay	*Cyanocitta stelleri*	G5	S5	
Birds	Clark's Nutcracker	*Nucifraga columbiana*	G5	S3	SOC
Birds	Black-billed Magpie	*Pica hudsonia*	G5	S5	
Birds	American Crow	*Corvus brachyrhynchos*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Common Raven	*Corvus corax*	G5	S5	
Birds	Black-capped Chickadee	*Poecile atricapillus*	G5	S5	
Birds	Mountain Chickadee	*Poecile gambeli*	G5	S5	
Birds	Red-breasted Nuthatch	*Sitta canadensis*	G5	S5	
Birds	White-breasted Nuthatch	*Sitta carolinensis*	G5	S4	
Birds	Pygmy Nuthatch	*Sitta pygmaea*	G5	S4	
Birds	Brown Creeper	*Certhia americana*	G5	S3	SOC
Birds	Rock Wren	*Salpinctes obsoletus*	G5	S5B	
Birds	House Wren	*Troglodytes aedon*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Pacific Wren	*Troglodytes pacificus*	G5	S3	SOC
Birds	Golden-crowned Kinglet	*Regulus satrapa*	G5	S5	

Species Group	Common Name	*Scientific Name*	Global Rank	State Rank	Species of Concern
Birds	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	*Regulus calendula*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Western Bluebird	*Sialia mexicana*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Mountain Bluebird	*Sialia currucoides*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Townsend's Solitaire	*Myadestes townsendi*	G5	S5	
Birds	Veery	*Catharus fuscescens*	G5	S3B	SOC
Birds	Swainson's Thrush	*Catharus ustulatus*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Hermit Thrush	*Catharus guttatus*	G5	S5B	
Birds	American Robin	*Turdus migratorius*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Varied Thrush	*Ixoreus naevius*	G5	S3B	SOC
Birds	Gray Catbird	*Dumetella carolinensis*	G5	S5B	
Birds	American Pipit	*Anthus rubescens*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Bohemian Waxwing	*Bombycilla garrulus*	G5	S5N	
Birds	Cedar Waxwing	*Bombycilla cedrorum*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Northern Shrike	*Lanius excubitor*	G5	S5N	
Birds	European Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris*	G5	SNA	
Birds	Warbling Vireo	*Vireo gilvus*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Red-eyed Vireo	*Vireo olivaceus*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Cassin's Vireo	*Vireo cassinii*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Orange-crowned Warbler	*Oreothlypis celata*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Yellow Warbler	*Setophaga petechia*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Yellow-rumped Warbler	*Setophaga coronata*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Townsend's Warbler	*Setophaga townsendi*	G5	S5B	
Birds	American Redstart	*Setophaga ruticilla*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Northern Waterthrush	*Parkesia noveboracensis*	G5	S5B	
Birds	MacGillivray's Warbler	*Geothlypis tolmiei*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Wilson's Warbler	*Cardellina pusilla*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Western Tanager	*Piranga ludoviciana*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Black-headed Grosbeak	*Pheucticus melanocephalus*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Lazuli Bunting	*Passerina amoena*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Spotted Towhee	*Pipilo maculatus*	G5	S5B	
Birds	American Tree Sparrow	*Spizella arborea*	G5	SUN	
Birds	Chipping Sparrow	*Spizella passerina*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Clay-colored Sparrow	*Spizella pallida*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Brewer's Sparrow	*Spizella breweri*	G5	S3B	SOC
Birds	Vesper Sparrow	*Pooecetes gramineus*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Lark Sparrow	*Chondestes grammacus*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Grasshopper Sparrow	*Ammodramus savannarum*	G5	S4B	
Birds	Fox Sparrow	*Passerella iliaca*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Song Sparrow	*Melospiza melodia*	G5	S5B	

Species Group	Common Name	*Scientific Name*	Global Rank	State Rank	Species of Concern
Birds	Lincoln's Sparrow	*Melospiza lincolnii*	G5	S5B	
Birds	White-crowned Sparrow	*Zonotrichia leucophrys*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Dark-eyed Junco	*Junco hyemalis*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Snow Bunting	*Plectrophenax nivalis*	G5	S5N	
Birds	Red-winged Blackbird	*Agelaius phoeniceus*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Western Meadowlark	*Sturnella neglecta*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Brewer's Blackbird	*Euphagus cyanocephalus*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Common Grackle	*Quiscalus quiscula*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Brown-headed Cowbird	*Molothrus ater*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Bullock's Oriole	*Icterus bullockii*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Northern Oriole	*Icterus galbula*	G5	SNR	
Birds	Pine Grosbeak	*Pinicola enucleator*	G5	S5	
Birds	Cassin's Finch	*Haemorhous cassinii*	G5	S3	SOC
Birds	House Finch	*Haemorhous mexicanus*	G5	S5	
Birds	Red Crossbill	*Loxia curvirostra*	G5	S5	
Birds	White-winged Crossbill	*Loxia leucoptera*	G5	S4	
Birds	Common Redpoll	*Acanthis flammea*	G5	S5N	
Birds	Hoary Redpoll	*Acanthis hornemanni*	G5	SNA	
Birds	Pine Siskin	*Spinus pinus*	G5	S5	
Birds	American Goldfinch	*Spinus tristis*	G5	S5B	
Birds	Evening Grosbeak	*Coccothraustes vespertinus*	G5	S3	SOC
Mammals	Masked Shrew	*Sorex cinereus*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Vagrant Shrew	*Sorex vagrans*	G5	S4	
Mammals	Dusky or Montane Shrew	*Sorex monticolus*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Little Brown Myotis	*Myotis lucifugus*	G3	S3	SOC
Mammals	Yuma Myotis	*Myotis yumanensis*	G5	S3S4	PSOC
Mammals	Long-eared Myotis	*Myotis evotis*	G5	S4	
Mammals	Fringed Myotis	*Myotis thysanodes*	G4	S3	SOC
Mammals	Long-legged Myotis	*Myotis volans*	G5	S4	
Mammals	Western Small-footed Myotis	*Myotis ciliolabrum*	G5	S4	
Mammals	Silver-haired Bat	*Lasionycteris noctivagans*	G5	S4	PSOC
Mammals	Big Brown Bat	*Eptesicus fuscus*	G5	S4	
Mammals	Hoary Bat	*Lasiurus cinereus*	G5	S3	SOC
Mammals	Townsend's Big-eared Bat	*Corynorhinus townsendii*	G3G4	S3	SOC
Mammals	Mountain Cottontail	*Sylvilagus nuttallii*	G5	S4	
Mammals	Snowshoe Hare	*Lepus americanus*	G5	S4	
Mammals	Yellow-pine Chipmunk	*Tamias amoenus*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Red-tailed Chipmunk	*Tamias ruficaudus*	G5	S4	
Mammals	Yellow-bellied Marmot	*Marmota flaviventris*	G5	S4	

Species Group	Common Name	*Scientific Name*	Global Rank	State Rank	Species of Concern
Mammals	Columbian Ground Squirrel	*Urocitellus columbianus*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Golden-mantled Ground Squirrel	*Callospermophilus lateralis*	G5	S4	
Mammals	Red Squirrel	*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Deer Mouse	*Peromyscus maniculatus*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Southern Red-backed Vole	*Myodes gapperi*	G5	S4	
Mammals	Meadow Vole	*Microtus pennsylvanicus*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Montane Vole	*Microtus montanus*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Long-tailed Vole	*Microtus longicaudus*	G5	S4	
Mammals	Western Jumping Mouse	*Zapus princeps*	G5	S4	
Mammals	Porcupine	*Erethizon dorsatum*	G5	S4	PSOC
Mammals	Coyote	*Canis latrans*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Gray Wolf	*Canis lupus*	G4	S4	
Mammals	Red Fox	*Vulpes vulpes*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Black Bear	*Ursus americanus*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Grizzly Bear	*Ursus arctos*	G4	S2S3	SOC
Mammals	Raccoon	*Procyon lotor*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Marten	*Martes americana*	G5	S4	
Mammals	Fisher	*Martes pennanti*	G5	S3	SOC
Mammals	Long-tailed Weasel	*Mustela frenata*	G5	S5	
Mammals	American Mink	*Mustela vison*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Wolverine	*Gulo gulo*	G4	S3	SOC
Mammals	Striped Skunk	*Mephitis mephitis*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Canada Lynx	*Lynx canadensis*	G5	S3	SOC
Mammals	Bobcat	*Lynx rufus*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Mountain Lion	*Puma concolor*	G5	S4	
Mammals	Elk	*Cervus canadensis*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Mule Deer	*Odocoileus hemionus*	G5	S5	
Mammals	White-tailed Deer	*Odocoileus virginianus*	G5	S5	
Mammals	Moose	*Alces americanus*	G5	S4	
Reptiles	Northern Rubber Boa	*Charina bottae*	G5	S4	
Reptiles	Terrestrial Gartersnake	*Thamnophis elegans*	G5	S5	
Reptiles	Common Gartersnake	*Thamnophis sirtalis*	G5	S4	

Appendix B. State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) Letter

Big Sky. Big Land. Big History.
Montana
Historical Society

June 22, 2015

Scott Eggeman
MT FWP
311 Dearborn Ave
Missoula MT 59801

RE: CLEAR CREEK FEE ACQUISITION, 760 ACRES TNC LAND, NEVADA LAKE WMA.
SHPO Project #: 2015062203

Dear Scott:

I have conducted a cultural resource file search for the above-cited project located in Sections 1, 11, T12N R10W. According to our records there have been two previously recorded sites within the designated search locales. In addition to the sites there have been a few previously conducted cultural resource inventories done in the areas. I've attached a list of these sites and reports. If you would like any further information regarding these sites or reports you may contact me at the number listed below.

It is SHPO's position that any structure over fifty years of age is considered historic and is potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. If any structures are to be altered and are over fifty years old we would recommend that they be recorded and a determination of their eligibility be made.

As long as there will be no disturbance or alteration to structures over fifty years of age we feel that there is a low likelihood cultural properties will be impacted. We, therefore, feel that a recommendation for a cultural resource inventory is unwarranted at this time. However, should structures need to be altered or if cultural materials be inadvertently discovered during this project we would ask that our office be contacted and the site investigated.

If you have any further questions or comments you may contact me at (406) 444-7767 or by e-mail at dmurdo@mt.gov. I have attached an invoice for the file search. Thank you for consulting with us.

Sincerely,

Damon Murdo
Cultural Records Manager
State Historic Preservation Office

Appendix C. Socio-Economic Assessment

Clear Creek Addition to the Nevada Lake Wildlife Management Area: Socio-Economic Assessment

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Prepared by Darlene Edge, FWP Lands Unit; July 21, 2015

I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature and encoded in Sections 87-1-241 and 87-1-242, Montana Code Annotated (MCA), established policies and funding for the Habitat Montana program through which Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) acquires interests in land to secure, develop and maintain wildlife habitat. Acquisitions can be by fee title, conservation easement, or lease. In 1989, the Montana legislature passed House Bill 720, requiring that FWP prepare a socioeconomic assessment for Habitat Montana acquisitions. The purpose of the socioeconomic assessment is to evaluate any "significant potential social and economic impacts" of the acquisition on local governments, employment, schools, and local businesses.

This socioeconomic assessment addresses Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' proposed purchase of approximately 760 acres in Powell County, Montana, to be managed as an addition to and consistent with the Nevada Lake Wildlife Management Area.

II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

Property Description:
The proposed addition to the Nevada Lake Wildlife Management Area (WMA) is located about 7 miles southeast of Helmville in Powell County. The parcel is 760 acres of intermountain forest adjacent to the Nevada Lake Wildlife Management Area in west-central Montana's Blackfoot Valley.

The property borders the Nevada Lake WMA and the Clear Creek parcel lies within a critical forested habitat corridor in the southeastern Blackfoot watershed. The parcel comprises 760 acres and > 90% of which are forested. The parcel is former industrial timberlands currently owned by The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

Current Use:
The Clear Creek addition is used for open space at the present time. FWP has not been apprised of any grazing leases on the property, and the landowner has expressed an interest in keeping this land in open space for wildlife habitat and recreation.

Property improvements consist only of limited fencing, and there are no residences or other buildings on the proposed WMA.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Land Management and Government Services:
The proposed land acquisition will place approximately 760 acres in ownership of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. This acreage is currently managed as undeveloped habitat, forested land, with no fee hunting or other economic return. Under FWP management, this acreage will

be managed as a part of the Nevada Lake WMA. Thus, no change in local government services is anticipated for the property.

FWP has a weed management agreement in place with the Powell County Weed District, specifying respective roles in control efforts for noxious weeds on FWP lands in the county. FWP has an active weed control program for its public recreation sites throughout Montana.

As a requirement under the Forest Legacy Program, FWP has developed a forest stewardship plan and intends to actively manage the Clear Creek addition's forests. Forest management would target forest health improvements and restoration with an eye for enhancing wildlife habitat.

Economic Activity:
The financial impacts to local businesses (i.e., income and employment) are addressed by looking at the change in expenditures associated with the activities this property currently provides, compared to the activities that would occur under FWP's proposed land acquisition.

FWP acquisition of these 760 acres will make this currently private land available for public recreation, thus increasing opportunities for hunting, wildlife viewing, and camping. These uses can be expected to provide a minor boost to regional economic activity (such as food/lodging and sporting equipment sales) associated with hunting and other outdoor recreation.

Future forest management and restoration has the potential to generate revenue for area mills through timber sales, in addition to providing work for local logging contractors. The result would be a minor but potentially consistent revenue source to the regional economy.

The land is not currently used for other economic activity.

In sum, while FWP's management will generally continue the status quo, public ownership of the property could have a minimally positive impact on local economic activity through improved public recreational opportunities, forest management, and the resulting effect on local businesses that provide related goods and services. The FWP land will require no additional public services, except annual weed control efforts.

Property Taxes:
The sale of the fee title land and subsequent title transfer to FWP will not change the tax revenue that Powell County currently collects on this property because, under Section 87-1-603, MCA, FWP is required to pay "to the county 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." Current property taxes on the 760 acres are estimated to be about $1,000 annually, and FWP will continue to make these payments, based on the assessment provided by Powell County.

IV. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' fee title acquisition of approximately 760 acres for an addition to the Nevada Lake Wildlife Management Area will provide long term protection of wildlife habitat, continue managing the land as a working forest, and provide additional public recreation opportunities. Placing this land in FWP ownership will not require any additional local government services. The acquisition will not have any "significant potential social and economic impacts."