

**Draft Environmental Assessment  
For  
Keogh Ranch Conservation Easement Addition  
May 2016**

**1.0: PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION**

**1.1 Proposed Action**

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) proposes to purchase a conservation easement on a 41-acre in-holding that lies in the middle of the existing Keogh Conservation Easement property (7,106 encumbered acres) located 15 miles north of Whitehall, MT. The in-holding used to be owned by the BLM but is now in the possession of the Fitzgerald family who also owns the land encumbered by the FWP conservation easement. The cost of the easement is \$46,400. The Treasure State Chapter of the Mule Deer Foundation (Butte, MT) has committed to contribute \$10,000 toward the purchase. The balance of costs would be paid for through FWP's Habitat Montana Program. The in-holding would be encumbered with the same terms as the surrounding easement and managed under the same management plan.

**1.2 Need for the Action**

The 41-acre parcel is in a prime residential development location. Residential subdivision has occurred less than two miles away at the southern boundary of the conservation easement. Because the in-holding is located in the middle of the conservation easement, the potential disturbance from residential development is substantial.

The Keogh Conservation Easement is located in the intermountain valley between the Boulder Mountains to the west and the Bull Mountains to the east. It is a working cattle and hay ranch that also provides important wildlife habitat. The property extends from the valley floor to the foothills of the Boulder and Bull Mountains. The land is comprised of native shrub grassland habitats intersected by Little Whitetail Creek and associated riparian habitat. The property supports breeding mountain plovers and the western most known black-tailed prairie dog colony in Montana. It provides year-round range for mule deer and antelope as well as fall and winter range for elk and is an important link between the two mountain ranges. The ranch is enrolled in Block Management and provides hunting access for an average of 400 hunters annually. Hunttable species include elk, mule deer, antelope, mountain lion, and upland game birds. In addition, they allow public fishing access to their reservoir. Conservation values and recreation opportunities could be impacted if this in-holding were developed, sold, subdivided, or habitat lost through conversion.

**1.3 Location of Proposed Action**

The Keogh Conservation Easement property is located 15 miles north of Whitehall, MT, in Jefferson County (Fig. 1). The 41-acre in-holding is located in the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 4 of T03N, R4W. It is located in Hunting District 350 for deer, elk, antelope, and moose.

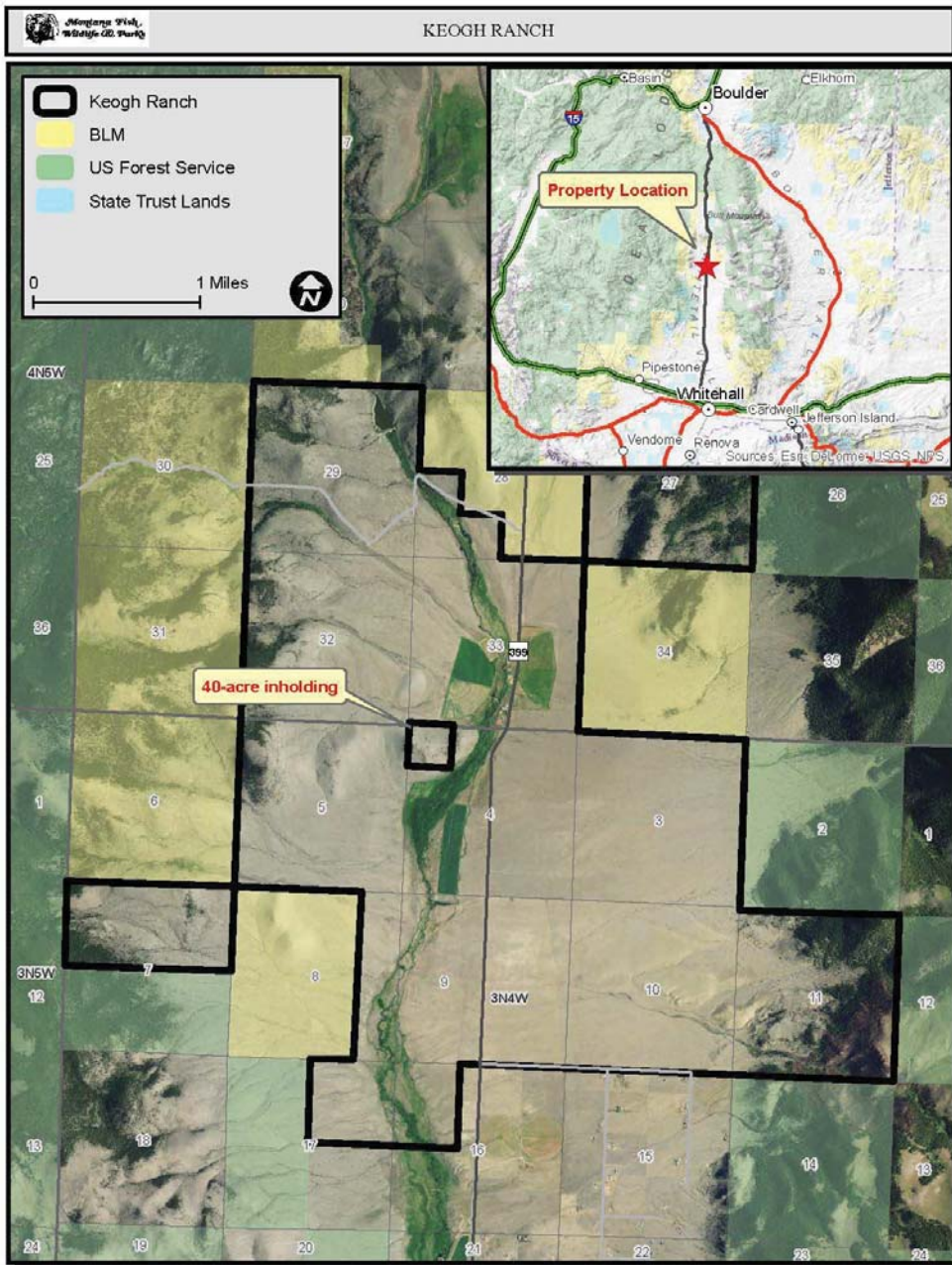
**1.4 Objective of Proposed Action**

The objective of purchasing a conservation easement on this 41-acre in-holding is to ensure the long-term protection of the wildlife and recreational values of this property and the adjacent 7,106 acres of the existing Keogh Ranch conservation easement, all while maintaining a viable family agricultural operation.

### 1.5 Authority and Direction

FWP has the authority under law (Section 87-1-201, MCA) to protect, enhance, and regulate the use of Montana's fish and wildlife resources for the public benefit now and in the future. In 1987, the Montana Legislature passed HB 526 which earmarked hunting license revenues to secure wildlife habitat through lease, conservation easement, or fee title acquisition (87-1-241 and 242). This is now referred to as the Habitat Montana Program. Purchasing a conservation easement on this 41-acre in-holding would secure the conservation of native plant communities so that they would continue to support game and other wildlife species while also keeping the parcel in agricultural production. This proposal was endorsed by the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission on April 12, 2016, allowing FWP to proceed with this environmental analysis.

Figure 1: Location of the proposed action.



As with other FWP property interest proposals, the Fish and Game Commission must approve any lands projects proposed by the agency. This Environmental Assessment is part of the decision making process.

Montana’s State Wildlife Action Plan (2015) guides conservation throughout the state by identifying community types and species with significant issues that warrant conservation attention. Under this plan, the proposed action area is classified as a Tier 1 ecotype of Sagebrush-Steppe. Tier 1 indicates an ecotype of greatest conservation need, and SWAP directs that these areas be protected through conservation easements and fee title acquisitions funded by Habitat Montana and other funding sources. Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) that are associated with this ecotype and are known to occur or likely to occur in the area are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Montana’s Species of Concern that are associated with the sagebrush-steppe habitat type and known to occur or likely to occur in the proposed action area.

Common Name	Scientific Name
Black-tailed Prairie Dog	<i>Cynomys ludovicianus</i>
Mountain Plover	<i>Charadrius montanus</i>
Clark’s Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga columbiana</i>
Long-billed Curlew	<i>Numenius americanus</i>
Burrowing Owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>
Ferruginous Hawk	<i>Buteo regalis</i>

### 1.6 Decision

Based on his review of the project as well as public comment, FWP’s Region 3 Supervisor would decide whether or not to approve the purchase of a conservation easement on this 41-acre in-holding that lies in the middle of the existing Keogh Conservation Easement property.

## 2.0: ALTERNATIVES

**2.1 Alternative A (No Action):** FWP does not purchase a conservation easement on a 41-acre in-holding within the existing Keogh Conservation Easement property.

Under this alternative, the 41-acre in-holding will be unencumbered by a conservation easement. Without these encumbrances development, subdivision, and/or habitat conversion could occur on this parcel as the landowner chooses.

**2.2 Alternative B (Proposed Action):** FWP purchases and monitors a conservation easement on a 41-acre in-holding within the existing Keogh Conservation Easement property. The cost of the easement (\$46,400) would be paid for through a \$10,000 grant from the Treasure State Chapter of the Mule Deer Foundation (Butte) and the balance of costs from FWP’s Habitat Montana Program, which is primarily derived from nonresident hunting license fees.

Under this alternative, the terms of the conservation easement on the 41-acre in-holding would be the same as those on the adjacent 7,106 acres of the existing Keogh Ranch conservation easement and would be managed as one property (see Appendix A “Keogh Ranch Conservation Easement Management Plan”).

### **3.0: AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT**

#### **3.1 Description of Relevant Affected Resources**

##### **3.1.1 Soil & Geologic**

The geology of the 41-acre parcel of the Keogh Ranch is Boulder Batholith. Soils are primarily Rencot, Lahood, and rock outcrops. Rencot and LaHood soils are well-drained gravelly residuum weathered from fine-grained sandstone. Ecological site descriptions vary from very shallow to silty-droughty. Rocky outcrops are volcanic and sandstone.

##### **3.1.2 Air & Noise**

There are no roads on the 41-acre in-holding. Off-road vehicle travel occurs occasionally as part of normal ranch operations. There is occasional noise and dust from livestock, ranch and farming equipment, and traffic on the Boulder-Whitehall Road located approximately 1 mile to the east of the parcel.

##### **3.1.3 Water & Fisheries**

Little Whitetail Deer Creek is the main drainage running through the Keogh Ranch. It is considered a trout stream with brook trout being the dominant fish species. Little Whitetail Creek is used by the current family, the Fitzgerald family, as an irrigation source for hay land and crop pastures as well as a recreational area for fishing on the upper reaches of the creek to the Keogh Reservoir.

There are four main tributaries of Little Whitetail Creek on the Keogh Ranch. Hay Canyon Creek and Pony Creek flow from the west and Dearborn Creek and Potter Creek flow from the east. These tributaries provide water for livestock and wildlife. The four drainages are intermittent streams and are not considered fisheries.

None of these streams or tributaries occurs on the 41-acre in-holding.

##### **3.1.4 Vegetation**

The 7,106 acre Keogh Ranch is located in the valley between the Boulder and Bull Mountains. Elevations vary from 4800 feet in the valley floor to 6400 feet in the foothills of the mountains. Little Whitetail Creek and its tributaries flow through the property. The lower elevation of the ranch is made up primarily of native grassland intersected by a series of intermittent stream courses and associated riparian habitats. Approximately 350 acres of the 7,106-acre Keogh Ranch is used as hay land. Of these acres, about half is irrigated alfalfa/grass mix and the remainder is native hay land found in pockets along Little Whitetail Creek. A 100-acre pastured has been seeded to crested wheatgrass. It has not been reseeded in over 25 years.

The upper elevations of the property where the 41-acre in-holding is located consist of grass/shrubland habitat. The dominant grasses on this parcel are bluebunch wheatgrass and needleandthread grass while rubber rabbitbrush and big sagebrush are the dominant shrubs. Cactus, plantain, and buckwheat comprise the majority of the forb community. Rocky Mountain juniper and Douglas-fir occur in sparse amounts throughout the lower foothills and in larger stands at higher elevations. Precipitation in this area is 10-14 inches annually with most of the precipitation coming in the form of winter snow.

### 3.1.5 Wildlife

The Keogh Ranch has a diversity of wildlife species that utilize it. Over 30 species of mammals are known to occur on the Keogh Ranch including elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, moose, antelope, black bear, mountain lion, bobcat, red fox, coyote, mink, short- and long-tailed weasels, yellow-bellied marmot, white-tailed jackrabbit, mountain cottontail, and black-tailed prairie dog. More than 130 species of birds are known to occur or have the potential to occur on the Keogh Ranch including golden eagle, ferruginous hawk, Cooper's hawk, blue grouse, ruffed grouse, Hungarian partridge, burrowing owl, mountain plover, and numerous songbird species. Eleven species of amphibians and reptiles have been documented on the ranch including the western hognose snake, prairie rattlesnake, and rubber boa.

Regarding big game species, the uplands and valley bottoms on the Keogh Ranch provide year-round habitat for mule deer, antelope, and elk. White-tailed deer and moose make use of the riparian corridors along Little Whitetail Creek and its tributaries. Big game relies heavily on the timber stands of Douglas-fir and Rocky Mountain juniper for thermal and hiding cover.

The Keogh Ranch is surveyed annually for elk during the winter and biennially for antelope during the summer. The Keogh Ranch typically winters 150-350 elk. Elk use the ranch both as winter range and as a migration route between mountain ranges. Antelope population in the Little Whitetail Valley ranges from 150-275 with 75-125 of those making use of habitat on the Keogh property.

Approximately 90 acres of the Keogh Ranch contain an active prairie dog colony. This is believed to be the western-most extension of black-tailed prairie dogs in Montana.

Six Montana species of concern are known to occur on the Keogh Ranch: black-tailed prairie dog, mountain plover, Clark's nutcracker, long-billed curlew, burrowing owl, and ferruginous hawk.

### 3.1.6 Aesthetics

The 41-acre in-holding is comprised of native rangeland. It has no developments, including roads, on it. It is contiguous with the surrounding 7,106 encumbered acres of the Keogh Ranch that cannot be developed or subdivided, thereby retaining its natural aesthetics and beauty.

### 3.1.7 Cultural & Historic

The Keogh Ranch headquarters historically had been a stagecoach stop on the Boulder-Whitehall Road. Because the 41-acre in-holding is located over a mile from the headquarters and in dry, rocky terrain, it is unlikely to have been used for any cultural or historically purposes.

### 3.1.8 Recreation

As part of the terms of the conservation easement, the Keogh Ranch must provide access to a minimum of 250 hunters annually. This term has consistently been honored since the inception of the easement. The current family that owns the ranch, the Fitzgerald family, allows as many as 400 hunters annually. They also allow free public access to anglers to fish their reservoir. In addition, the Keogh Ranch is bordered by approximately 19 miles of public lands and is the only access to much of the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service lands surrounding their property. The Keogh family has historically allowed hunting, fishing, and camping access both on their property and to the public lands beyond. The Fitzgerald family continues to provide these opportunities to the recreating public.

Because elk, mule deer, antelope, and prairie dogs are readily visible from the county road that runs through the Keogh Ranch, wildlife viewing is popular.

### 3.1.9 Health Risks/Hazards

There are no health risks or hazards associated with the proposed action.

### 3.1.10 Community Resources

The Keogh Ranch, now owned by the Fitzgerald family, is a thriving working ranch. The ranch allows for a maximum of 1,700 animal unit months of grazing annually. In addition, approximately 350 acres of hay land occur on the Keogh Ranch.

## **4.0: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES**

### **4.1 Description of Relevant Affected Resources**

#### 4.1.1 Soil & Geologic

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative A*

If this 41-acre in-holding remains unencumbered by a conservation easement, the negative impacts described above could occur. The parcel could be developed, subdivided, converted to agricultural crop, or the sagebrush manipulated. If any of these activities occurred, a road would have to be built to access this parcel, further impacting the soils in the area.

There would be no short- or long-term effects on the overall geologic substrate.

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative B*

If FWP purchases a conservation easement on the 41-acre in-holding of the existing 7,106 encumbered acres of the Keogh Ranch, the terms of the easement would preclude activities that would have a negative impact on soil condition. Those terms include restriction on development, subdivision, cultivation, and sagebrush control or manipulation. These actions would cause major disturbance to the soil including erosion, removal, and a decrease in organic matter and moisture content through loss of vegetative cover.

#### 4.1.2 Air & Noise

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative A*

There are no predicted consequences affecting air and noise if FWP does not purchase a conservation easement on this 41-acre in-holding of the existing Keogh Ranch easement.

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative B*

Same as Alternative A.

#### 4.1.3 Water & Fisheries

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative A*

If FWP does not purchase an easement on this parcel, it could be developed, subdivided, or have native range lost to conversion. Any of these actions could cause erosion leading to silt deposition into Little Whitetail Creek.

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative B*

If FWP purchases a conservation easement on this 41-acre in-holding of the existing Keogh Ranch easement, the native vegetation on this parcel will remain intact and undisturbed, minimizing any erosion of silt into Little Whitetail Creek.

#### 4.1.4 Vegetation

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative A*

If FWP does not purchase an easement on this parcel, there would be no encumbrances that would prevent the loss of native vegetation from development, subdivision, conversion, or other land uses causing surface disturbance.

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative B*

If FWP purchases a conservation easement on this 41-acre in-holding, it will be encumbered by the same terms as the existing Keogh Ranch easement. Subdivision, development, and loss of native vegetation through conversion would be restricted in perpetuity. The native sagebrush-steppe habitat will remain intact and available for wildlife. The Fitzgerald family would continue to use this parcel as part of their rest-rotation grazing program for livestock production and would continue to manage the area for weeds.

#### 4.1.5 Wildlife

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative A*

If this parcel remains unencumbered, the Fitzgerald family or future owners could subdivide, develop, cultivate, or fence this parcel in such a way to negatively impact wildlife. Any of these actions would remove the natural integrity and function of the parcel as viable wildlife habitat.

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative B*

The proposed action would benefit wildlife by protecting in perpetuity the native sagebrush-steppe habitat of this parcel. This protection would positively impact not only this parcel but the surrounding 7,106 encumbered acres of the Keogh Ranch. The terms of the easement to conserve the land as productive agricultural ranch land and open space will benefit many of Montana's native wildlife species. Game species such as mule deer, antelope, and mountain lions will benefit from having a contiguous tract of native habitat. Furbearer species such as bobcat, coyotes, red fox, and weasels will also benefit along with several other native species of mammals, birds, and reptiles. By protecting this parcel as part of the existing Keogh easement, the six Montana species of concern that occur on the Keogh Ranch (black-tailed prairie dog, mountain plover, Clark's nutcracker, long-billed curlew, burrowing owl, and ferruginous hawk) will also benefit from having intact habitat.

#### 4.1.6 Aesthetics

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative A*

If this parcel remains unencumbered, the Fitzgerald family or future owners could subdivide, develop, or cultivate this parcel. These actions would impact the natural look and feel of the area.

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative B*

If FWP purchases a conservation easement on this 41-acre in-holding of the Keogh Ranch, the natural integrity and character of the parcel will be retained in perpetuity. The parcel would continue to be part of a working cattle ranch. It will continue to add to the nature-scape of the area.

#### 4.1.7 Recreation

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative A*

If this parcel remains unencumbered by a conservation easement, public access to this parcel to hunt would not be guaranteed in perpetuity. The Fitzgerald family would likely to continue to allow access, but if they sell the parcel, future access would be contingent upon the new landowners.

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative B*

If FWP purchases a conservation easement on this 41-acre in-holding of the Keogh Ranch easement, the public would have access to this parcel during the hunting season in perpetuity.

#### 4.1.8 Cultural & Historic

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative A*

While the Keogh home site has historical significance as having been a stop along the stagecoach line between Boulder and Whitehall, there are no predicted cultural or historical consequences whether FWP purchases a conservation easement on this 41-acre in-holding of the Keogh Ranch or not.

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative B*

Same as Alternative A.

#### 4.1.9 Hazards / Risks

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative A*

There are no predicted hazards or risks to human health and safety from Alternative A.

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative B*

Same as Alternative A.

#### 4.1.10 Community Resources

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative A*

If FWP does not purchase a conservation easement on this 41-acre in-holding, the Fitzgerald family would likely continue to allow public hunting access to this parcel. However, they'd also have the option to sell this parcel, and the next owner might not allow access to the public. If this parcel is not sold, the Fitzgerald family would continue to utilize it as part of their ranching operation.

##### *Predicted Consequences of Alternative B*

If FWP purchases a conservation easement on this 41-acre in-holding, the terms of the easement would allow for public hunting access in perpetuity. This parcel would be encumbered by the terms of the easement that restricts development or subdivision. The Fitzgerald family would continue to use this parcel as part of their rest-rotation grazing program on their deeded ground, thereby maintaining a viable family ranching operation.

There would be no effect on local or state tax bases or revenues if FWP purchased an easement on this in-holding.



## 5.0 MONITORING & LONG-TERM MANAGEMENT

If the proposed action is taken, FWP would purchase a conservation easement on the 41-acre in-holding. The terms of the easement would be identical to the existing Keogh Ranch conservation easement and would be managed under the existing management plan. The in-holding and the other encumbered acres would be monitored annually by FWP's land steward to ensure that the terms of the easement are being met.

## 6.0 POTENTIAL LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

If this 41-acre in-holding of the Keogh Ranch remains unencumbered by a conservation easement, there is the potential for this parcel to be developed, subdivided, and/or the native range lost to some means of conversion. This would have a major impact on the wildlife use and movements in the area. The natural integrity of the area would lose some of its ecological value and function affecting all wildlife that utilizes the Keogh Ranch including six Montana species of concern.

If the proposed action is taken, a conservation easement on this 41-acre in-holding would be included in the already encumbered 7,106 acres of the Keogh Ranch. The entire ranch would be protected under the terms of the easement, ensuring the long-term maintenance of excellent wildlife habitat and continued use as a traditional ranching operation.

## 7.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND COLLABORATORS

### 7.1 Public Participation

This project has been discussed with the Jefferson Valley Sportsmen, Treasure State Chapter of the Mule Deer Foundation, the Whitehall Community and Technical Advisory Committee, and Skyline Sportsmen Association.

In addition, the public will be notified in the following manner to comment on this draft EA:

- Two public notices in each of these papers: *The Montana Standard* (Butte) and *The Ledger* (Whitehall)
- One statewide press release
- Direct mailing to adjacent landowners and interested parties, and
- Public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>.

Copies of the draft EA will be available for public review at FWP Region 3 Headquarters and at the FWP Butte Area Resource Office. This level of public notice and participation is appropriate for a project of this scope.

The public comment period will extend for (30) thirty days. Written comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m., June 24, 2016 and can be mailed to the address below:

Keogh Ranch CE Addition  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
1820 Meadowlark Lane  
Butte, MT 59701

Or email comments to: [yboccadori@mt.gov](mailto:yboccadori@mt.gov) . Please put "EA Comment" in the subject line.

## **7.2 Collaborators - Other Agencies/Offices that Contributed to the EA**

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks: Fisheries, Legal, and Wildlife

### **8.0 ANTICIPATED TIMELINE**

Public Comment Period of EA: May 26 – June 24, 2016

Decision Notice: June 27, 2016

Completion of Project: October 31, 2016

### **9.0 DETERMINATION IF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT IS REQUIRED**

Based upon the above assessment, which has identified a limited number of minor impacts to the physical and human environment that will be either for a short duration or that the effects of the proposed project can be mitigated below the level of significance, an EIS is not required and an environmental assessment is the appropriate level of review. The purchase of a conservation easement on this 41-acre in-holding of the Keogh Ranch will be beneficial to wildlife, the public and the Fitzgerald family.

### **10.0 EA PREPARER**

Vanna Boccadori, FWP Wildlife Biologist, Butte, MT

### **REFERENCES**

Montana's State Wildlife Action Plan. 2015. Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 East Sixth Avenue, Helena, MT 59620. 441 pp.

## APPENDIX A

### KEOGH RANCH CONSERVATION EASEMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN

#### I. INTRODUCTION

The 7,106 acre Keogh ranch is located in the Little Whitetail Creek valley approximately 11 miles north of Whitehall. The ranch extends across the valley floor and includes foothills of both the Bull Mountains to the east and Boulder Mountains to the west. In addition to private land, the Keogh ranch incorporates approximately 5 ½ sections of adjacent BLM administered lands into its livestock operation, totaling 10,630 acres.

A variety of aspects, elevations, and moisture regimes provide for a diversity of habitats on the ranch. The valley is made up primarily of native grassland intersected by a series of intermittent stream courses and associated riparian habitats. Foothills comprise sagebrush grasslands and to a lesser extent montane forest.

The Keogh ranch is an important asset to wildlife occurring in the area. Elk use the ranch both as winter range and as a migration route between mountain ranges. Some of the elk which summer in the Boulder Mountains migrate through the Keogh Ranch to winter in the Bull Mountains. The valley portion of the ranch provides yearlong habitat for antelope and white-tailed deer. Mule deer are also common over most of the ranch. The mix of habitats on the ranch is likewise attractive to a variety of nongame wildlife.

The primary purpose in acquiring a conservation easement on the Keogh Ranch is to protect important habitats from subdivision and human development, maintaining a productive ranching operation. An easement with FWP will serve to protect and/or enhance habitat quality (i.e. soil, water, vegetation), providing for the needs of wildlife and livestock. In addition, the easement will ensure hunter access both to the Keogh Ranch and adjacent public land will be maintained.

Funds used for acquiring this easement would come from hunting license revenues earmarked by House Bill 526 for the Habitat Montana program.

This management plan was written to describe various management actions which will occur as a result of a conservation easement on the Keogh Ranch. Unless otherwise noted, strategies described in the following section will be the responsibilities of FWP. This Management Plan will be updated as necessary by consent of the Landowner and FWP.

## II. GOAL

The overall management goal and purpose of the Keogh Ranch Conservation Easement is to:

*Conserve, protect, and enhance in perpetuity the wildlife habitat and agricultural values of the Keogh Ranch while providing public hunting opportunities as recreation and a management tool.*

## III. OBJECTIVES

**Objective 1:** Protect and, where necessary, improve the productivity of soils, water, and vegetation in a manner which will mutually benefit livestock grazing and wildlife.

- Problem** The distribution of habitat types and vegetation baseline information for the Keogh Ranch needs to be collected.
- Strategy** Develop a Baseline Inventory (as described in the statewide habitat plan) which will provide a basis for future comparison of ranch layout and habitat condition. This would involve mapping habitats and unique features which occur on the ranch.
- Strategy** In consultation with the FWP vegetation ecologist, monitor vegetation and habitat condition over time by establishing permanent photoplots and vegetation transects in each vegetation community (revisited on a 5-year schedule). Aerial photographs may also be used for monitoring changes in vegetation over time.
- Problem** It is unknown whether the existing grazing system, which was recently initiated, will improve the condition of riparian and upland vegetation.
- Strategy** Continue the existing rest-rotation grazing system and monitor response of riparian and upland vegetation as described above. *← FWP*
- Strategy** If the existing grazing system results in degradation of soils or vegetation, FWP will work with the landowner, in consultation with FWP's Range Specialist, to improve the existing grazing system or design a new grazing system which would improve range condition and increase available forage for livestock and wildlife.
- Problem** The terms of the conservation easement will require implementation and monitoring.
- Strategy** A primary purpose of the Easement is to prevent certain land use practices

which may negatively impact wildlife. FWP will monitor land use on the Keogh Ranch by ground and aerial observation (i.e. during big game surveys) and through annual visits with the landowner. These visits will build a working relationship between FWP and the landowner and will ensure objectives are being met and opportunities for improvements are pursued.

FWP will also work with the landowner if the landowner pursues activities which are listed in the easement as "allowable only with written approval from FWP".

Some of the major land use restrictions which are designed to protect wildlife values on the Keogh Ranch and will be monitored by FWP include:

- ◆ Subdividing is prohibited because of direct conflicts human development has on wildlife and their habitat.
- ◆ Fences which inhibit wildlife movements, including woven wire fences are prohibited. FWP will recommend construction and maintenance of fences in a manner which allows passage by antelope and other wildlife. The bottom strand should be at least 18" above ground and the top wire should be no higher than 46".
- ◆ Sagebrush manipulation or control is prohibited. Sagebrush is an important native shrub which provides cover, browse, and nesting sites for an abundance of wildlife species and adds to the areas overall habitat diversity.
- ◆ Commercial timber harvest is prohibited. Timber on the Keogh Ranch provides thermal and hiding cover for elk and deer which winter along the foothills of Bull and Boulder Mountains. In addition, montane forest is one of the vegetation communities which adds to the area's habitat diversity.
- ◆ Cultivation is limited to existing hay and grain fields and an additional 200 acres described in the easement. Grass andshrub landss will otherwise remain intact to benefit wildlife and provide for livestock grazing.

**Problem** There may be habitat enhancement opportunities for upland game birds or waterfowl which are not addressed in the easement.

**Strategy** FWP will review the ranch's potential for habitat enhancements and pursue habitat projects which are of interest to the landowner and meet habitat program objectives.

physiological stress.

**Strategy** FWP discourages unnecessary human activities which might disturb big game wintering on the ranch. The easement stipulates against leasing the property for winter recreation.