

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

BLACKFOOT CLEARWATER GAME RANGE DISPOSAL OF PROPERTY, POWELL COUNTY, MONTANA

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Project (W-30-L Amendment #15)

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has prepared this document in accordance with the procedures for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as it applies to the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act (64 Stat. 595; 16 U.S.C. Sec. 669 *et. seq.*).

The Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) proposes to dispose of a property purchased in the 1940s. This property was purchased in part with Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act program funds which provided 75 percent of the cost of the land that became part of the Blackfoot Clearwater Game Range. In the 1960s, much of the surrounding property was traded for other properties north of State Highway 200 that offered greater wildlife values by providing increased connectivity within the Blackfoot Clearwater Game Range. Due to an administrative oversight, a 7-acre parcel was excluded from these earlier land exchanges and is now geographically separate from the Blackfoot Clearwater Game Range.

The proposed action consists of FWP purchasing the Federal interest in the 7-acre parcel of the Blackfoot Clearwater Game range described above. FWP has determined that the land no longer serves the purpose for which it was acquired and has requested approval from the Service, Division of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration, to purchase the Federal interest in the land with non-license FWP funds. The current value of the parcel will be determined through the preparation of a complete, self-contained, appraisal report conducted by a state-certified appraiser in accordance with the *Uniform Standards for Professional Appraisal Practice* and the *Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisitions*. Once completed, an independent state-certified review appraiser will then review the appraisal. The Federal share of the appraised value (75 percent) will be credited to the FWP Wildlife Restoration account to compensate that program using non-license FWP funds.

After the FWP Wildlife Restoration Program account has been repaid, the 7-acre parcel will be exchanged for a nearby 1-acre parcel adjacent to the Scotty Brown Bridge currently held in private ownership. The 1-acre parcel would be used by FWP for development of a Fishing Access Site for public use on the Blackfoot River. Although not a requirement of the subsequent land exchange, the private landowners who will receive the 7-acre parcel are expected to incorporate it into an existing Conservation Easement held by Nature Conservancy that covers their surrounding lands. Therefore, FWP anticipates the parcel will continue to be maintained as open woodlands in perpetuity, and will not undergo subdivision or commercial development.

The proposed action constitutes a Federal action subject to the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended. The Service and FWP prepared a Draft Environmental Assessment (DEA) entitled, *Disposal of Property in the Blackfoot Clearwater Game Range Acquired in Part with Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act Funds*, to analyze the effects on the human environment and document the findings. The DEA analyzed the effects on the environment of the proposed action and a “No Action” alternative. There were no other alternatives because this proposal is for disposal of a small piece of land totally separate from the Blackfoot Clearwater Game Range and offers no habitat for big game management, since it is surrounded by private property. Under the “No Action” alternative, FWP would not dispose of the 7-acre tract, and there would be no change to current management practices.

The DEA was released for a 15-day public comment period on February 22, 2008. The Service received one comment in favor of the proposed action in response to the DEA.

The FWP provided notices and copies of the EA to more than 100 individuals and organizations and solicited comments from the affected public. FWP also published the EA and supporting documentation entitled, *Scotty Brown Bridge FAS Acquisition and Improvement*. FWP also published the notice and supporting documentation on their website: http://fwp.mt.gov/publicnotices/notice_1319.aspx. FWP received no comments from the public.

The FWP and the Service have concluded that the proposed project will have no impact on floodplains or wetlands, will not affect historical and cultural resources, will have no effect on threatened, endangered, or candidate species and will not impact vegetation in the area. The Final Environmental Assessment is on file in the Regional Office of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 134 Union Boulevard, Lakewood, Colorado, 80228, and is available for public review upon request.

Based on review of the Environmental Assessment and evaluation of the outcome of the proposed action, I have determined that the proposed action is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment within the meaning of Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. Consequently, I have determined that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

APPROVAL: _____ Signed by Jay Slack _____ 3-13-08
Deputy Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 6 Date