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Draft
environmental
assessment (for)
Beckman wildlife
management area
proposed
acquisition

Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Wildlife Division

Draft Environmental Assessment

STATE DOCUMENTS COLLECTION

BECKMAN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA PROPOSED ACQUISITION

JUN 07 1999

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I. INTRODUCTION

Mr. LeRoy Byron Beckman's Last Will and Testament established the RBB Deer Lands Trust Fund to acquire lands for deer and public hunting. Mr. Beckman's Will instructed Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) to assist in locating these lands, and that the lands should be within Fergus, Judith Basin, Cascade, or Meagher Counties; mountain or valley lands; that are partly timbered; that has a stream running through it; and that the lands be comparable in cost to other lands in the area. Mr. Beckman further instructed that after the land was acquired that the title and management be transferred to MFWP.

Within the 4 identified counties, MFWP personnel have recently completed a thorough examination of numerous properties that were known to be for sale, that might meet Mr. Beckman's conditions. Of them, the Steiners' Trail's End Ranch was the best match. It was MFWP's recommendation. The RBB Deer Lands Trust Fund purchased the property June 7, 1999.

The state of Montana recognizes that 3 native plant communities are very important wildlife habitat in need of conserving. Those plants communities are: riparian, sagebrush-grassland, and intermountain grassland. Since the Steiners' Trail's End Ranch includes riparian and sagebrush plant communities, as well as meets the terms of Mr. Beckman's Last Will and Testament, the MFWP Region 4 Supervisor recommends that the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commission accept fee title and management of the property from the RBB Deer Lands Trust Fund, and that the property be named the Beckman Wildlife Management Area.

II. AUTHORITY AND DIRECTION

MFWP is authorized by statute (87-1-201) to protect, enhance and regulate the use of Montana's fish and wildlife resources for public benefit now and in the future. In 1987, the Montana Legislature passed HB526 which regulates wildlife habitat leases, conservation easements, and/or fee title acquisition (87-1-241 and 242). The Fish, Wildlife & Parks

PLEASE RETURN

Commission and the State Land Board must approve any acquisition of land proposed by the agency. This Environmental Assessment is part of the decision making process.

III. LOCATION OF PROJECT and PHYSIOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

The proposed property is 2,565 acres located in the Judith River breaks, Fergus County, 12 miles northeast of Denton, Montana (see map Appendix I). The Judith River flows from the southwest to the northeast across 3.6 miles of the property. Along the river are almost 1000 acres of bottom lands. The remaining acres are classified as river breaks. They consist of steep-sided coulees with ridges and benches that drain into the bottoms. There are 12 coulees that run water intermittently, in which there are 7 perennial springs. The property's east boundary is a bluff, 200 feet high, which overlooks the river.

Elevations range from 3,040 to 3,680 feet. Soils are generally deep well drained clay loams. Annual precipitation ranges from 12 to 16 inches. The mean temperature is 44 degrees Fahrenheit. The average frost free period is 120 to 130 days.

Legal description of the proposed project property:

County: Fergus

Township 19 North, Range 16 East:

Section 27: SW1/4NE1/4, NW1/4SE1/4, SW1/4, part of SW1/4SE1/4 lying westerly of a certain barrier known as a cutbank or rimrock
Section 28: S1/2SE1/4
Section 33: N1/2SE1/4, Lot 2, NE1/4NE1/4, S1/2NE1/4
Section 34: NW1/4, N1/2SW1/4, SW1/4NE1/4, part of NW1/4NE1/4 lying westerly of a certain barrier known as a cutbank or rimrock

Township 18 North, Range 16 East:

Section 3: Lot 4
Section 4: Lots 1, 2, 3 and 4, S1/2N1/2, SW1/4, NW1/4SE1/4
Section 5: Lot 1, SE1/4NE1/4, SE1/4, E1/2SW1/4
Section 9: NW1/4NW1/4

Township 19 North, Range 16 East:

Section 32: Lots 1 and 2, N1/2S1/2, S1/2N1/2
Section 33: Lots 1, 2 and 4, N1/2SW1/4, S1/2NW1/4, NE1/4NW1/4, NW1/4NE1/4
Section 34: Lot 4

Total Deeded = 2,565 acres

The accompanying map (Appendix I) displays the lands affected by the proposal. The project's exterior boundary is irregularly shaped and is 12 miles in length. Eight different private landowners own 10 parcels of land that border the project. One neighbor has an easement across one mile of the property which is used for accessing one parcel of their land. One county road runs into the center of the property about 2 miles where it dead ends at the headquarter buildings. There are no state or federal lands associated with, or connected to, this property.

IV. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROJECT

The proposed property is river breaks habitat, consisting of 3 major vegetative types. A ponderosa pine / Douglas fir-juniper type occurs on the more moist ridges and coulees; a sagebrush-grassland type occurs on the drier benches, sidehills, and terraces; and a cottonwood / willow riparian type occurs on the flood plain. Some of the grassland terraces on the river bottom have been cultivated into alfalfa or tame grass hay fields.

Because the proposed property has steep terrain with diverse aspects these vegetative types produce a diversity of plant species that are high quality deer forage through all seasons on most years. Consequently, the property is year-round habitat for as many as 80 mule deer and 40 white-tailed deer (and almost twice that number during early spring and late summers when deer are drawn to the irrigated hay fields from adjacent properties.) Ring-necked pheasants are also common in the river bottom. Though less common, sharp-tailed grouse, Merriam's turkey, antelope, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, fox, badger, and skunk use the property, as do a diverse group of small mammals and birds. A list of wildlife species potentially using this area is contained in Appendix II.

Every year, all across central and eastern Montana, finding places to hunt becomes more difficult. A poor agricultural economy induces some landowners to charge fees, outfit, or lease the hunting rights to others. Many ranches are being purchased by people from out of the area who are less receptive to public hunting. And many ranches, with similar wildlife resources and scenery, are being subdivided.

In the immediate area around Denton, Montana, there is little public land available to the public for recreation. Excluding the occasional tract of Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation land that's located on a public road, the closest legally accessible public land for deer hunting is at least 40 miles away. Public lands available for upland bird hunting, or other recreational activities, are also very scarce. The proposal property does have good public access via a county road that dead ends in the center of the property. And even though deer and upland bird populations are currently below the long-term average, acquiring this property would immediately and significantly improve recreational opportunities in central Montana.

Since the proposal property contains riparian and sagebrush-grassland habitat relative to the Habitat Montana classification of important and/or threatened habitats in Montana, and since the property is very good "WINTER-SUMMER range lands PRIMARILY FOR DEER", the property is most worthy of Mr. Beckman's vision that the land be "used for Wildlife Conservation purposes and as a Public Hunting Ground", and that it "shall be held for PERPETUITY".

V. SCOPE FOR THE PROJECT

Conserve and enhance land, water, and wildlife:

(1) The proposal area contains 2,565 acres. It will be managed in perpetuity to enhance soils, water, vegetation, and wildlife species' habitats for the benefit of the general public.

(2) The current condition of the habitat is fair to good. Areas near water sources have been heavily utilized by livestock and are in fair condition. Due to pasture configuration and past ranch management some pastures have received disproportionately higher levels of grazing and are only in fair condition. Vegetation condition is better (good) in more remote, steep areas and farther from watering sources. About 40 percent of the property is in good condition.

(3) Wildlife species of major interest are: mule deer, white-tailed deer, and pheasants. Species that are seasonally on the property and/or are not abundant, are pronghorn antelope, sharp-tailed grouse, Merriam's turkey, Hungarian partridge, mountain lion, bobcat, coyote, fox, badger, skunk, various waterfowl species, and a variety of non-game birds and mammals.

(4) Population objectives for the major wildlife species are: 120 mule deer and 60 white-tailed deer during fall, before hunting season. Current populations are estimated to be about 50% of objective for both species. Spring pheasant numbers are not known. The objective is to increase next springs pheasant count by 5X in succeeding years. Other wildlife species that are adapted to more residual and woody vegetative cover, as well as to agricultural crops such as alfalfa, will likely increase.

Contribute to hunting opportunity:

(1) The proposal property is accessible to the general public via a county road into the center of the property, via foot travel from adjacent private lands with landowner permission, and via boat travel on the Judith River. Additional foot access may be pursued through enrollment of neighboring properties into MFWPs Block Management Program, or possibly through conservation easement or acquisition of adjacent properties.

(2) During the past decade the most mule deer harvested on the property during one hunting season was approximately 20 males and 2 females. For white-tailed deer during one season it was approximately 2 males and 2 females. The most pheasants that were harvested on the property during a fall was about 20 roosters.

The harvest objective for mule deer will start at 15 males and 10 females, and for white-tailed deer the objective will start at 5 males and 5 females. The objective for pheasants is to increase harvest by 4X in 5 years. These species' populations, and their harvest, will be surveyed and monitored annually. Harvest objectives may be changed accordingly.

Over time, as game populations respond to increased forage quantity and quality, hunting recreation should at least quadruple, primarily because of the expected increase in the number of pheasants and pheasant hunters. Hunting recreation for deer and pheasants alone is anticipated to reach 600 hunter days per year.

Contribute to non-hunting recreation:

(1) Hiking, fishing, picnicking, camping, bird watching, wildlife observing, horseback riding, and antler and flower picking will be available to the general public from April 1 through December 15.

(2) The number of non-hunting recreation days provided is anticipated to be 200 days annually.

Protect open space and scenic areas:

(1) These vegetation and topographic features provide diverse and unique examples of native habitats greatly threatened by recreation homesite development. The breaks and riparian vegetative types are excellent wildlife habitat that is attractive to wealthy hunters who want to own a private hunting ranch, or to outfitters wishing to increase their client base or client success/satisfaction. Such interests have been expressed or intended.

Maintain local tax base, while demonstrating productive wildlife habitat is compatible with agriculture and other land uses:

(1) Since the historic land use has been limited to a single family livestock operation, the change in tax dollars remitted to Fergus County when the property becomes a Wildlife Management Area, if different, will be minor. An annual "in lieu of taxes" payment will be made by MFWP to Fergus County equal to land rates for other landowners in the County.

(2) The primary goal for the property is to improve the condition and productivity of all vegetative plant communities. This will increase the carrying capacity for deer and cattle. Since cattle grazing will be used as a tool to enhance the vegetation for wildlife, the

actual reduction in the number of cattle grazed in the County may not be consequential. Also, it is likely that there will be an increase in the number of acres that are farmed and/or hayed, actually increasing the property's agricultural output and tax base.

Other Management Implications:

- (1) The subject property has been managed as a year-round 150 pair cow/calf operation. Hay production usually did not exceed what was annually needed on the ranch. MFWP intends to increase alfalfa hay production as well as raise small grain crops on additional acres. To improve range condition on the property MFWP will likely implement a grazing system that incorporates new pastures with more rest and rotation. All of these practices will supplement the local agricultural economy.
- (2) Several species of noxious weeds are on the subject property. MFWP will endeavor to stop the spread, and reduce the occurrence, of noxious weeds on the property. Biological, chemical, and mechanical treatments will be used.
- (3) No significant increase in MFWP manpower is expected relative to the acquisition and management of the proposed property. The Department will make physical improvements only as time and manpower allow. Other physical improvements may be accomplished in conjunction with haying and grazing leases with private agricultural producers.
- (4) A proposed travel plan calls for a seasonal closure of the property from December 16 through March 31. Fergus County will be asked to grant a seasonal road closure on the county road where it enters the property. This will reduce road maintenance, and snow removal, during the winter.

VI. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT CHECKLIST

| ITEM: | POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT | | | | | COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES |
|---|---|------|-------|------|------|----------------------------|
| | MAJOR | MOD. | MINOR | NONE | UNK. | |
| TERRESTRIAL & AQUATIC LIFE & HABITATS | X | | | | | X |
| WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY, & DISTRIBUTION | X | | | | | X |
| GEOLOGY & SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY, & MOISTURE | X | | | | | X |
| VEGETATION COVER, QUALITY, & QUANTITY | X | | | | | X |
| AESTHETICS | | X | | | | X |
| AIR QUALITY | | | | X | | |
| DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND | | | | X | | |
| WATER, AIR, & ENERGY | | | | X | | |

VII. EXPLANATION OF IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

TERRESTRIAL AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS

Positive and major impacts to mule deer, white-tailed deer, upland game birds, native species' habitats, and aquatic habitats will occur as a result of management emphasis directed to improve vegetation communities for the benefit of both species of deer and pheasants.

WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY, AND DISTRIBUTION

Water quality and quantity will greatly improve with controlled livestock grazing that leaves more residual cover in the uplands and riparian areas. The total amount of water used for irrigation should not differ significantly over past usage.

GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY, AND MOISTURE

Major and positive impacts to soil conditions will occur due to reduced livestock trampling in riparian areas and increased forage remaining following grazing treatments. Increased amounts of residual vegetation over the entire area will improve soil fertility, quality, stability, and moisture retention.

VEGETATION COVER, QUALITY, AND QUANTITY

Reduction in winter and early spring livestock grazing, with increased pasture rest and rotation, will be a major improvement to plant species composition, coverage, and production. Because deer select/consume more browse and forbs than cattle, increased carrying capacity for deer as a consequence of changed livestock grazing will not nullify the improved vegetative condition.

AESTHETICS

Significant improvement of the visual quality of the area will occur as a result of improved vegetative composition, quantity, and quality.

VIII. HUMAN ENVIRONMENTAL CHECKLIST

| ITEM. | POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON HUMAN ENVIRONMENT | | | | | COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES |
|---------------------------------------|--|------|-------|------|------|----------------------------|
| | MAJOR | MOD. | MINOR | NONE | UNK. | |
| SOCIAL STRUCTURES & MORES | | | | X | | |
| CULTURAL UNIQUENESS & DIVERSITY | | | | X | | |
| LOCAL & STATE TAX BASE & TAX REVENUE | | | X | | | X |
| AGRICULTURAL OR INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION | | | X | | | X |
| HUMAN HEALTH | | | | X | | |

POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON HUMAN ENVIRONMENT (Continued)

| ITEM: | MAJOR | MOD. | MINOR | NONE | UNK. | COMMENTS ON ATTACHED PAGES |
|---|-------|------|-------|------|------|----------------------------|
| ACCESS TO & QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL & WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES | X | | | | | X |
| QUANTITY & DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT | | | X | | | X |
| DISTRIBUTION & DENSITY OF POPULATION & HOUSING | | | X | | | X |
| DEMANDS FOR ENERGY | | | | X | | |
| LOCALLY ADAPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS/GOALS | | | | X | | |
| TRANSPORTATION NETWORKS & TRAFFIC FLOWS | | | X | | | X |

IX. EXPLANATION OF IMPACTS TO THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUE

MFWP will make annual tax payments to Fergus County in an amount equal to the normal level assessed for land in the area. A slight reduction in the number of cattle grazed in the county may occur, though private agricultural operators who lease grazing on the property may actually increase their livestock numbers. An increase in the production of hay and small grains is expected. Having the project property open to public recreation will increase income to local merchants and businesses. Cumulatively, this will be a minor positive effect on tax revenues.

AGRICULTURAL OR INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

Even with a planned increase in hay/grain production, and the anticipated improvement in range condition and production, there will be a minor reduction in animal unit months in the short term.

ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES

Improved recreational opportunities will occur as a result of public ownership of the project area. Compared to past recreational opportunities, the impact will be a major improvement.

QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT

The project property will no longer be a single family ranch. Other than specialized services, past management seldom employed additional people. It's unlikely that public ownership will result in increased employees, even though specialized, contracted services will increase. MFWP employees may be stationed on the property seasonally. Local agricultural operators that lease the property's grazing or haying may increase their work force. The total impacts will be minor.

DISTRIBUTION AND DENSITY OF POPULATION AND HOUSING

Under public ownership no one will permanently reside on the property, though employees may be stationed on the property seasonally. Local agricultural operators that lease the property's grazing and/or haying may increase the number of their employees and their housing. The cumulative impacts will be minor.

TRANSPORTATION NETWORK AND TRAFFIC FLOWS

During the fall hunting season there will a noticeable increase in vehicular traffic to the property. During the winter there will be noticeably less vehicular traffic to the property. During the spring/summer period vehicular traffic will probably be unchanged compared to past traffic flows. All in all the impact will be minor.

X. DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION OF REASONABLE ALTERNATIVES

1. No Action Alternative:

The "No Action" alternative would not preserve or enhance the diversity of wildlife habitats on the property for perpetuity. The "No Action" alternative would not preserve or enhance the general public's recreational opportunities for perpetuity.

2. Fee Title Acquisition Alternative: (Preferred Alternative)

To comply with Mr. Beckman's Last Will and Testament, the RBB Deer Lands Trust Fund desires to transfer fee title and management of the property to MFWP. The "Preferred" alternative would grant this transfer, and the property would become the Beckman Wildlife Management Area. It would be managed primarily for deer and deer hunting. This alternative also meets important habitat objectives of MFWP.

XI. EVALUATION OF NEED FOR AN EIS

Based on the environmental assessment (EA), there will not be any significant negative impacts from the proposed action. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required and an EA is the appropriate level of review. The overall impact from the successful completion of the proposed action would provide substantial long term benefits to both the physical and human environment.

XII. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A public hearing was conducted on June 29, 1999.

Duration of comment period for the Draft Environmental Assessment is/was 31 days.

The public comment period is June 29 through July 29, 1999.

As of June 29, 1999, the proposed project has been discussed with most of the adjacent landowners and the Fergus County Commission.

**PRELIMINARY MANAGEMENT PLAN
for the
BECKMAN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA**

INTRODUCTION

LeRoy Byron Beckman's Last Will and Testament established the RBB Deer Lands Trust Fund to acquire "WINTER-SUMMER range lands PRIMARILY FOR DEER, as a Public Hunting Ground". Mr. Beckman's Will then instructs the RBB Deer Lands Trust Fund to transfer the title and management of the land to the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP).

Because of the 1987 Wildlife Habitat Acquisition Act (House Bill 526) the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission adopted rules which specify that a Preliminary Management Plan be written before any final action shall be taken on newly acquired lands. This Preliminary Management Plan is intended to give an immediate general analysis and to provide the basis for public comment.

The Preliminary Management Plan identifies MFWP's management goals for the property. More specific work activities will be formulated for the final Management Plan after proper inventories have been made, compliance requirements met, and after public comments have been reviewed. The final Management Plan will be available for public review prior to being approved by the Commission. Once the final Management Plan is in place, it will be reviewed periodically and necessary adjustments incorporated.

After the Steiners' Trail's End Ranch is purchased and given to MFWP it will become the Beckman Wildlife Management Area (BWMA). The BWMA will be managed by MFWP, primarily, for mule and white-tailed deer and upland game birds. Agricultural practices, such as producing hay and grazing livestock, will be used as necessary to meet habitat objectives for the primary wildlife species, and for other wildlife species when appropriate.

AREA DESCRIPTION

Location and Physiographic Characteristics:

The Steiners' ranch is 2,565 acres located in the Judith River breaks, Fergus County, 12 miles northeast of Denton, Montana (see map Appendix 1). The Judith River flows from the southwest to the northeast across 3.6 miles of the property. Along the river are almost 1000 acres of bottom lands. The remaining acres are classified as river breaks. They consist of steep-sided coulees with ridges and benches that drain into the bottoms. There are 12 coulees that run water intermittently, in which there are 7 perennial springs. The

property's east boundary is a bluff, 200 feet high, which overlooks the river.

Elevations range from 3,040 to 3,680 feet. Soils are generally deep well drained clay loams. Annual precipitation ranges from 12 to 16 inches. The mean temperature is 44 degrees Fahrenheit. The average frost free period is 120 to 130 days.

Legal description of the proposed project property:

County: Fergus

Township 19 North, Range 16 East:

- Section 27: SW1/4NE1/4, NW1/4SE1/4, SW1/4, part of SW1/4SE1/4 lying westerly of a certain barrier known as a cutbank or rimrock
- Section 28: S1/2SE1/4
- Section 33: N1/2SE1/4, Lot 2, NE1/4NE1/4, S1/2NE1/4
- Section 34: NW1/4, N1/2SW1/4, SW1/4NE1/4, part of NW1/4NE1/4 lying westerly of a certain barrier known as a cutbank or rimrock

Township 18 North, Range 16 East:

- Section 3: Lot 4
- Section 4: Lots 1, 2, 3 and 4, S1/2N1/2, SW1/4, NW1/4SE1/4
- Section 5: Lot 1, SE1/4NE1/4, SE1/4, E1/2SW1/4
- Section 9: NW1/4NW1/4

Township 19 North, Range 16 East:

- Section 32: Lots 1 and 2, N1/2S1/2, S1/2N1/2
- Section 33: Lots 1, 2 and 4, N1/2SW1/4, S1/2NW1/4, NE1/4NW1/4, NW1/4NE1/4
- Section 34: Lot 4

Total Deeded = 2,565 acres

The accompanying map (Appendix 1) displays the lands affected by the proposal. The project's exterior boundary is irregularly shaped and is 12 miles in length. Eight different private landowners own 10 parcels of land that border the project. One neighbor has an easement across one mile of the property which is used for accessing one of their parcels of land. One county road runs into the center of the property about 2 miles where it dead ends at the headquarter buildings. There are no state or federal lands associated with, or connected to, this property.

Vegetation

Present

The proposed Beckman WMA (Steiners' ranch) is identified as river breaks habitat, consisting of 3 major vegetative types. The ponderosa pine / Douglas fir-juniper type occurs on the more moist aspects of ridges and coulees. A grassland type occupies the drier benches and sidehills and is dominated by western wheatgrass, needleandthread and blue grama. Most of the river bottom riparian type consists of cottonwood / willow stands (about 250 acres) and grassland terraces (about 400 acres). The cottonwood / willow stands also have understory vegetation comprised of western snowberry, Wood's rose, chokecherry, silver buffaloberry, and redosier dogwood. Most of the riparian grassland terraces have been cultivated into alfalfa and tame grass hay fields.

These vegetative types, combined with the topographic features, make the property year-round habitat for mule and white-tailed deer. To a lesser extent, sharp-tailed grouse and Merriam's turkeys are also found in the uplands. Ring-necked pheasants make extensive use of the riparian vegetation on the river bottom. All of the vegetative types are utilized by a diverse group of small mammals and birds.

This property is currently managed as a cow/calf operation. Between 150 and 200 cows are grazed yearlong or season-long in 7 large pastures. During most years 120 acres of irrigated alfalfa were cut and harvested for hay, though almost 500 acres could have been hayed (100 to 200 acres of dryland hay, 150 to 190 acres of flood irrigated tame grass hay, and 120 acres of pump-irrigated alfalfa hay). Cattle were usually pastured on the hay fields from late summer through winter. The range condition is fair on most of the property.

Future

Because the native upland and riparian vegetation need some improvement relative to plant vigor and species composition, the property will be rested from livestock grazing for one complete growing season. Range condition, cattle stocking rates, and pasture configuration will then be reevaluated. Riparian areas will be fenced so cattle grazing/utilization can be deferred and/or more precisely managed. A grazing system will be designed and implemented to improve the condition and occurrence of desired woody and herbaceous plant species in all vegetative types. Such a grazing system will probably incorporate pasture rotation and rest and the development of stock watering facilities that are located outside of riparian areas. Cattle grazing of the riparian areas is expected to be much lighter than in the past.

To rectify a weed problem on one upland bench, at least 19 acres will probably be farmed to a small grain crop for 2 years and then reseeded to a grass or grass/legume mixture.

Between 20 and 30 acres of the irrigated alfalfa hay fields will also be farmed in small grains each year, for 2-year periods. This will maintain vigorous stands of alfalfa, while increasing forage diversity for wildlife, particularly deer and upland birds. To further enhance deer and upland bird habitat on the river bottom terraces, native plant species (primarily chokecherry, buffaloberry and juniper) will be planted in shelterbelts. Acreages that are farmed and/or irrigated may be increased.

The most productive irrigable alfalfa hay land (about 120 acres) will be irrigated, and possibly fertilized, each year by a lessee. To insure maximum production and yield, and regrowth available for wildlife, there will be 2 cuttings of hay that will be irrigated before, between and after. The harvested hay will be removed from the property when haying is completed.

The above described grazing and haying schedule will attract and hold deer on the property throughout the majority of most years. The improved vegetative condition, the early green-up of the range and hay fields, the regrowth of alfalfa after haying, and the increased amount of forage provided by palatable shrubs in the coulees and on the river bottoms will help alleviate deer use on adjacent landowners' crop and pasture lands.

Travel Plan

Present

Motor vehicle access is by means of one graveled county road that enters the property on the western border and continues into the center of the property about 2 miles, ending at the headquarter buildings on the river bottom. There is another vehicular trail that leaves this county road about half way into the property. It angles northeast across a bench and down a Coulee to the river bottom and another set of old buildings that are located 1.25 miles north of the headquarters. Off of this trail, on the bench, another trail enters a neighbor's property. This route to the neighbor's property is their legal access/easement. There are other unimproved dirt roads on the property that lead to almost every field or pasture.

Future

Motorize vehicles will be allowed on 2 designated roads/trails from April 1 through December 15. These roads/trails will lead to 3 designated parking areas, 1 of which will be located on the bench, the other 2 will be located on the river bottom at the ends of the roads (Map 1). Fergus County will be asked to grant a seasonal road closure from December 16 through March 31 for the one designated road that is the county road that goes to the headquarters.

Motorized vehicles will not be allowed off of the designated roads/trails (except for

authorized MFWP personnel and/or the current agricultural lessees or contractors). An exception to the seasonal road closure will be the neighbor's easement to their property to the north.

Camping will be allowed on the Beckman WMA in any of the designated parking areas. Camping will comply with MFWP Administrative Rule 12-8-205, which limits camping in designated camping areas to 14 days and prohibits camps from being left unattended for more than 48 hours. Primitive over night camping will be allowed outside of designated parking/camping areas (e.g., along the river). Primitive camps will be for a duration of 1 night and must be packed in by foot or boat.

Physical Developments

Present

The existing physical developments include external boundary fences (fair condition), internal pasture fences (poor to good condition), 2 older homes (1 is fair to good, the other is poor), 2 older barns (1 dilapidated, 1 fair), 2 corrals (1 dilapidated, 1 fair), 10 sheds or granaries (all dilapidated or poor), 3 wells located at the 2 residences/corrals, and 1 developed spring (fair condition). There are also 3 electric pump irrigation systems (gated pipe, wheel line and hand line), and 1 flood irrigation system, that are in good condition.

Future

Fences will be replaced and/or repaired as needed. Internal pasture fences may be removed and/or constructed to accommodate a redesigned livestock grazing system. Additional water developments will be required to accommodate improved distribution of cattle in the upland and riparian areas. The home, most recently used as a residence, will be maintained as the BMA headquarters for administrative purposes. The barn and corral located at the headquarters will also be maintained for administrative purposes. All other buildings/sheds/granaries will be destroyed or removed.

Improvements to the flood and electric pump irrigation systems would improve efficiency and operation and will be considered. They include squaring the fields, changing the layout of the main and lateral water lines, and construction of pump houses.

Wildlife

Present

Current wildlife use of the property includes the following animals (and/or groups of animals) and their present levels of use:

The primary species are mule and white-tailed deer. Mule deer occupy the upland coulees and ridges yearlong, but often make daily use of the alfalfa fields on the river bottom during periods when upland vegetation is desiccated. Mule deer numbers on the property fluctuate within and between years. Highest numbers are found during spring and fall. Through the years the lowest number of mule deer counted was 60, the highest number was 200. White-tailed deer, conversely, occupy the river bottoms yearlong except for brief forays to the uplands. Over the years there numbers have fluctuated between 20 and 50. Approximately 10 antelope utilize the property intermittently on a seasonal basis. Mountain lions utilize the area occasionally, while bobcat, coyote, fox, badger and skunk are more common. A small number of sharp-tailed grouse are sometimes found on the property. Sharp-tailed grouse are more common just off of the property. Ring-necked pheasants are common in the river bottom. Merriam's turkey utilize the property during late spring, summer and early fall. Thirty-five turkeys have been counted grouped up in early summer. Canada geese nest on the property while other species of waterfowl utilize the river seasonally. A variety of songbirds, raptors, and small mammals use the area in undermined numbers on a seasonal or yearlong basis.

Future

Upon acquisition, habitat management strategies will be directed towards improving the habitat, and carrying capacity, for mule and white-tailed deer, pheasants, sharp-tailed grouse, and other ground nesting waterfowl species. Other wildlife species adapted to more residual and woody vegetative cover, as well as agricultural crops such as alfalfa, will be benefited. Predator species associated with prey that prefer such habitats will increase in number. Wildlife species that are adapted to exploit heavily utilized habitats will decline.

AREA MANAGEMENT

Management Goals

The primary goal for management of the Beckman WMA will be to improve the condition of all vegetative plant communities. Implicit in this goal is to maximize the productivity of the land base, while minimizing maintenance and management requirements/involvement.

Increased carrying capacities for mule and white-tailed deer can be expected as vegetation conditions improve and adequate quantities of forage remain available during key seasonal periods (e.g., summer, fall and winter). This should reduce deer use of adjacent landowner's crops and pasture lands. The improvement of the habitat for mule and white-tailed deer will also benefit other game and nongame wildlife species.

A secondary goal will be to provide public access to the property for sport hunting and

other recreational pursuits.

Management Actions

The most essential and important components of a wildlife management area are soil and vegetation. Every management action on the area will be aimed at maintaining or improving the condition of vegetation and soils. Vegetative manipulations to improve habitat for wildlife may include livestock grazing, rest from livestock grazing, chemical and mechanical treatment, prescribed burning, and/or other common land management practices.

A change from present grazing practices to other grazing practices can be expected. This may include continuation of livestock grazing, but under a system that incorporates lower stocking rates and more rest and rotation of pastures. Initial efforts will focus on quantifying the condition and trend of existing vegetation and establishing long-term monitoring efforts.

Biological, chemical, and mechanical treatments may be employed to reduce the occurrence of noxious weeds, to renovate or establish hay/farm land, to establish stands of woody vegetation, and/or to stimulate rangeland vegetation.

The use of fire may be prescribed to manipulate plant communities. An example would be to modify plant successional stages, for example to increase the occurrence of desire shrub species. Any such effort would be made in coordination with adjacent landowners and state and county officials.

Public use and access to the property will be managed consistent with MFWP's state and regional management objectives for WMA's. Recreation on the Beckman WMA is expected to increase. Deer and upland bird harvest in the area is expected to increase. Public use of the area will be consistent with resource protection goals (i.e., vegetation and soil stability). A winter use closure to all unauthorized activities will be implemented to address wildlife energetic needs (i.e., minimize the energy loss for deer and upland birds during energetically demanding/critical periods). This winter closure concept is in effect on all wildlife management areas within MFWP's Region 4. Other regulations as they specifically relate to this and other WMA's will also apply. These include restrictions on fur trapping activities and a closure to mountain lion hunting after December 15.

MFWP will coordinate with adjacent landowners in developing certain land management plans/practices. These may include, but are not limited to: cooperative grazing systems, developing land trades, conservation easements, and/or additional land purchases. MFWP will promote its block management and hunting access programs with adjacent landowners affected by the acquisition of the Beckman WMA. Public entities such as the Bureau of Land Management, Farm Services Agency, Natural Resources Conservation

Service, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Fergus County Conservation District, Fergus County Extension Service, and the Fergus County Commissioners will be consulted and met with as requested and needed.

An annual "in lieu of taxes" payment will be made by MFWP to Fergus County equal to rates established for other landowners in the County.

Management Objectives

Manipulating vegetative plant communities on the Beckman WMA is expected to increase yearlong usage by mule and white-tailed deer, sharp-tailed grouse, and pheasants. The population objective is to have 120 mule deer and 60 white-tailed deer on the WMA during early fall. The population objective for ring-necked pheasants is to increase the number of males in spring to 5X the current number. The population objective for sharp-tailed grouse is to increase total number by 2X.

MFWP will continue its aggressive approach to weed management on the Beckman WMA. Noxious weeds will be identified, mapped, and controlled in a manner consistent with MFWP's Region 4 Weed Management Plan. There are 2 objectives for weed management on the Beckman WMA. (1) Will be to stop the spread of noxious weeds, and (2) reduce the occurrence of noxious weeds on the Beckman WMA. MFWP will use its own personnel and/or private contractors, and coordinate with adjacent landowners and county weed boards for weed control.

Impacts

Proposed changes in management direction for the Beckman WMA -- adjustments to some land use practices -- will benefit the wildlife currently using the area. Improving habitat quality and quantity will assist in alleviating potential deer problems on adjacent private lands. Should game depredation occur, one or more of the following methods will be implemented: scareguns; temporary panels for haystacks; materials for permanent haystack yards; kill permits; and special hunting seasons. A combination of the above methods would be used as necessary to resolve problems which might occur.

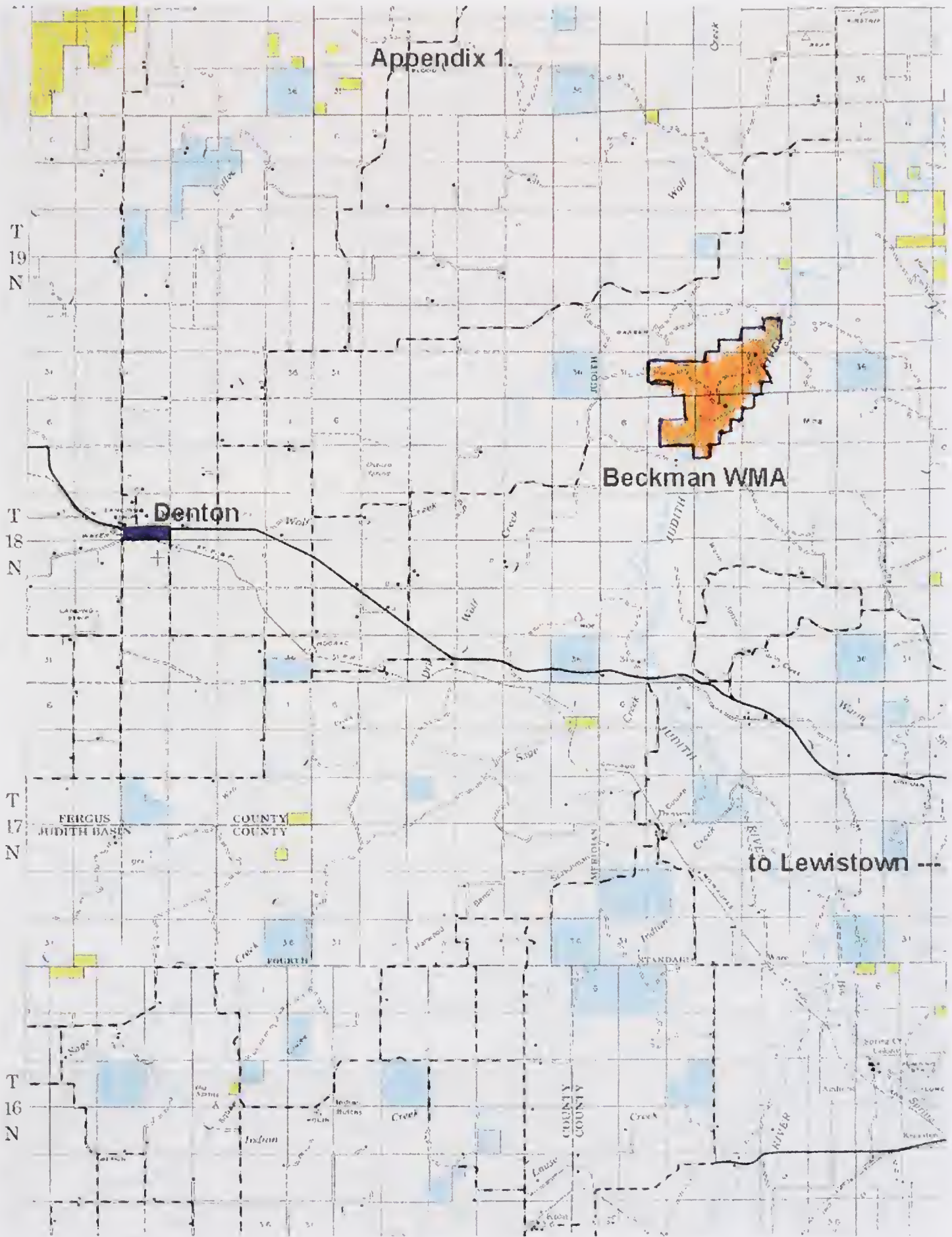
Public use of the property will be guaranteed from April 1 through December 15. Use during this period will be consistent with the established management/travel plan.

Management Activities

Aerial and ground surveys and inventories of wildlife use of the area will be conducted. The area will be used on occasion for capturing and individually marking deer and other wildlife as research needs arise. Changes in numbers and patterns of use by deer and other big game and wildlife species will be documented. Vegetation sampling and

evaluation will be conducted on a regular basis. Other land management specialists and agencies will be contacted as needed for technical assistance in order to implement specified management actions. Physical developments will be evaluated relative to management goals and objectives. Historic and cultural values and a final management plan will dictate the extent of physical development and activity that's needed. Entrance and boundary signs will be erected to facilitate public use and to inform the public of the benefits and opportunities in the area.

Appendix 1.



Appendix 1.



APPENDIX II

Most of the species listed below occur on the Beckman Wildlife Management Area. Others occur very nearby, and possibly on the Beckman Wildlife Management Area.

Mammals

Common shrew
Montana shrew
Little brown myotis
Long-eared myotis
Long-legged myotis
Small-footed myotis
Big brown bat
Hoary bat
Silver-haired bat
Townsend's big-eared bat
Ermine
Long-tailed weasel
Mink
River otter
Badger
Striped skunk
Red fox
Coyote
Mountain lion
Bobcat
Raccoon
Yellow-bellied marmot
Richardson's ground squirrel
Yellow-pine chipmunk
Red squirrel
Northern pocket gopher
Deer mouse
Bushy-tailed wood rat
Ord's kangaroo rat
Meadow vole
Gapper's red-backed vole
Montane vole
Prairie vole
Sagebrush vole
Western jumping mouse
Grasshopper mouse
Beaver
Muskrat
Porcupine
White-tailed jackrabbit
Mountain cottontail
Elk
White-tailed deer
Mule deer
Moose
Pronghorn

Birds (yearlong, seasonal, migratory)

Pintail
Mallard
Gadwall
Blue-winged teal
Cinnamon teal
Green-winged teal
Northern shoveler
American wigeon
Wood duck
Common goldeneye
Common merganser
Canada goose
Great blue heron
Sandhill crane
Common snipe

Turkey vulture
Northern harrier
Sharp-shinned hawk
Cooper's hawk
Brown creeper
Rock wren
Northern goshawk
Swainson's hawk
Red-tailed hawk
Ferruginous hawk
Rough-legged hawk
Bald eagle
Golden eagle
American kestrel
Merlin
Prairie falcon
Gray partridge
Blue grouse
Ruffed grouse
Sharp-tailed grouse
Sage grouse
Merriam's turkey
Ring-necked pheasant
Killdeer
Solitary sandpiper
Long-billed curlew
Rock dove
Mourning dove
Great horned owl
Long-eared owl
Northern pygmy-owl
Short-eared owl
Northern saw-whet owl
Burrowing owl
Common nighthawk
Common poorwill
Rufous hummingbird
Belted kingfisher
Lewis' woodpecker
Yellow-bellied sapsucker
Downy woodpecker
Hairy woodpecker
Northern flicker
Western wood-peewee
Hammond's flycatcher
Dusky flycatcher
Western flycatcher
Say's phoebe
Western kingbird
Eastern kingbird
Horned lark
Tree swallow
Violet-green swallow
Cliff swallow
Barn swallow
Rough-winged swallow
Blue jay
Gray jay
Steller's jay
Pinyon jay
Clark's nutcracker
Black-billed magpie
American crow
Common raven
Black-capped chickadee
Mountain chickadee

Red-breasted nuthatch
White-breasted nuthatch
House wren
Golden-crowned kinglet
Ruby-crowned kinglet
Eastern bluebird
Townsend's solitaire
Swainson's thrush
Hermit thrush
American robin
Gray catbird
Sprague's pipit
Bohemian waxwing
Cedar waxwing
Northern shrike
Loggerhead shrike
European starling
Warbling vireo
Solitary vireo
Yellow warbler
Yellow-rumped warbler
McGillivray's warbler
Common yellowthroat
Wilson's warbler
Western tanager
Lazuli bunting
Spotted towhee
American tree sparrow
Chipping sparrow
Clay-colored sparrow
Brewer's sparrow
Vesper sparrow
Lark sparrow
Savannah sparrow
Grasshopper sparrow
Fox sparrow
Song sparrow
White-crowned sparrow
Dark-eyed junco
Lapland longspur
Snow bunting
Red-winged blackbird
Bobolink
Western meadowlark
Brewer's blackbird
Common grackle
Brown-headed cowbird
Rosy finch
Cassin's finch
House finch
Red crossbill
Common redpoll
Pine siskin
American goldfinch
House sparrow

Amphibians

Tiger salamander
Woodhouse's toad
Western chorus frog
Northern leopard frog

Reptiles

Short-horned lizard

Snapping turtle
Racer
Milk snake
Gopher snake
Western rattlesnake
Common garter snake



