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VIA EMAIL
28 February 2020

FEB 28 2020

Commissioners Chilcott, Hoffman and Burrows
Ravalli County Commission
ctaggart@rc.mt.gov

Ravalli County Commissioners

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Dear Commissioners:

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife & Parks wishes to notify you of our proposed land purchase in Ravalli County. The purpose of the land purchase is to establish a permanent public fishing access site totaling 97 acres on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River 6 miles south of Darby, as well as to provide camping, hiking and hunting opportunities and to establish a new walk-in connection to US Forest Service land west and south of this parcel.

The project is the subject of an environmental assessment, released to the public on February 26, 2020. The Department published a public notice at that time. The full environmental assessment can be accessed at:

http://fwp.mt.gov/news/publicNotices/environmentalAssessments/acquisitionsTradesAndLeases/pn_0249.html.

Pursuant to House Bill 674, enacted by the 2009 Montana Legislature, the Department is providing the following information:

- **Property Description:** The property consists of 97 acres in total, including a 78-acre parcel on the Bitterroot River; and a 19-acre parcel west of West Fork Highway that is adjacent to the Bitterroot National Forest. The property is located about six miles south of Darby on West Fork Highway, a larger property than the current fishing access site that the Department currently leases from this landowner. Approximately 0.5 miles of the main stem of the West Fork flows through the property, with an additional 0.5 miles of side channels and 68 acres of associated riparian habitat. The riparian habitat includes 56 acres of mixed cottonwood and ponderosa pine riparian forest and 12 acres of willow thickets, gravel bars, and river channel. The upland portion of the property consists of open, large-diameter ponderosa pine forest connected to the Bitterroot National Forest. A location map, site map including conceptual site plan, and approximate legal description of the property are attached.
- **Property Use:** The property will be used as a public fishing access site, and will be named the "C. Ben White Memorial Fishing Access Site", commemorating the deceased son of the White/Stomberg family. Hunting may also be possible, particularly on the west side of West Fork Highway, and hunters can access National Forest land through this property.

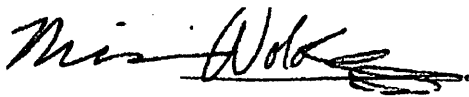
- **Property Taxes:** The annual property taxes on the land total about \$ 832.65 per year. Pursuant to Section 87-1-603, MCA, the Department will pay to Ravalli County a sum equal to the amount of taxes that would be payable on the county assessment if the property were in private ownership. The property has no building improvements on it except a gravel boat ramp and parking area.
- **Site Management and Costs:** The Department will manage the C. Ben White Memorial Fishing Access Site for public recreational use and will conduct enforcement, maintenance and oversight activities appropriate to the degree of public use and in response to any problems that might arise. FWP will work with the US Forest Service to create a trail that connects to the National Forest. Additionally, FWP will monitor public use of the C. Ben White Memorial FAS, and will work to mitigate any potential adverse effects that might occur to the property or to neighboring properties. FWP will manage weeds in accordance with its county weed management plan for fishing access sites and other FWP land. The estimated annual cost to the Department of site management, including operations, maintenance and staff costs, is \$ 3,500.00.
- **Potential Future Development:** Potential development of this site would likely include fencing, signage and information kiosk, a vault latrine near the boat ramp, a fee camping area on the west side of West Ford Road accommodating 1-3 primitive camp sites with an additional vault latrine and fee box, and a parking area, trailhead and trail on the upland portion of the property west of West Fork Road.

The Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission should be making its decision on the proposed land acquisition at its next scheduled meeting on April 23, 2020, in Helena. The agenda for that meeting should be available online at

<http://fwp.mt.gov/doingBusiness/insideFwp/commission/meetings/> in early April.

Please call Randy Arnold, our Regional Supervisor in the FWP Missoula office, at (406) 542-5500 if you have any questions or would like to discuss any aspects of the proposed acquisition.

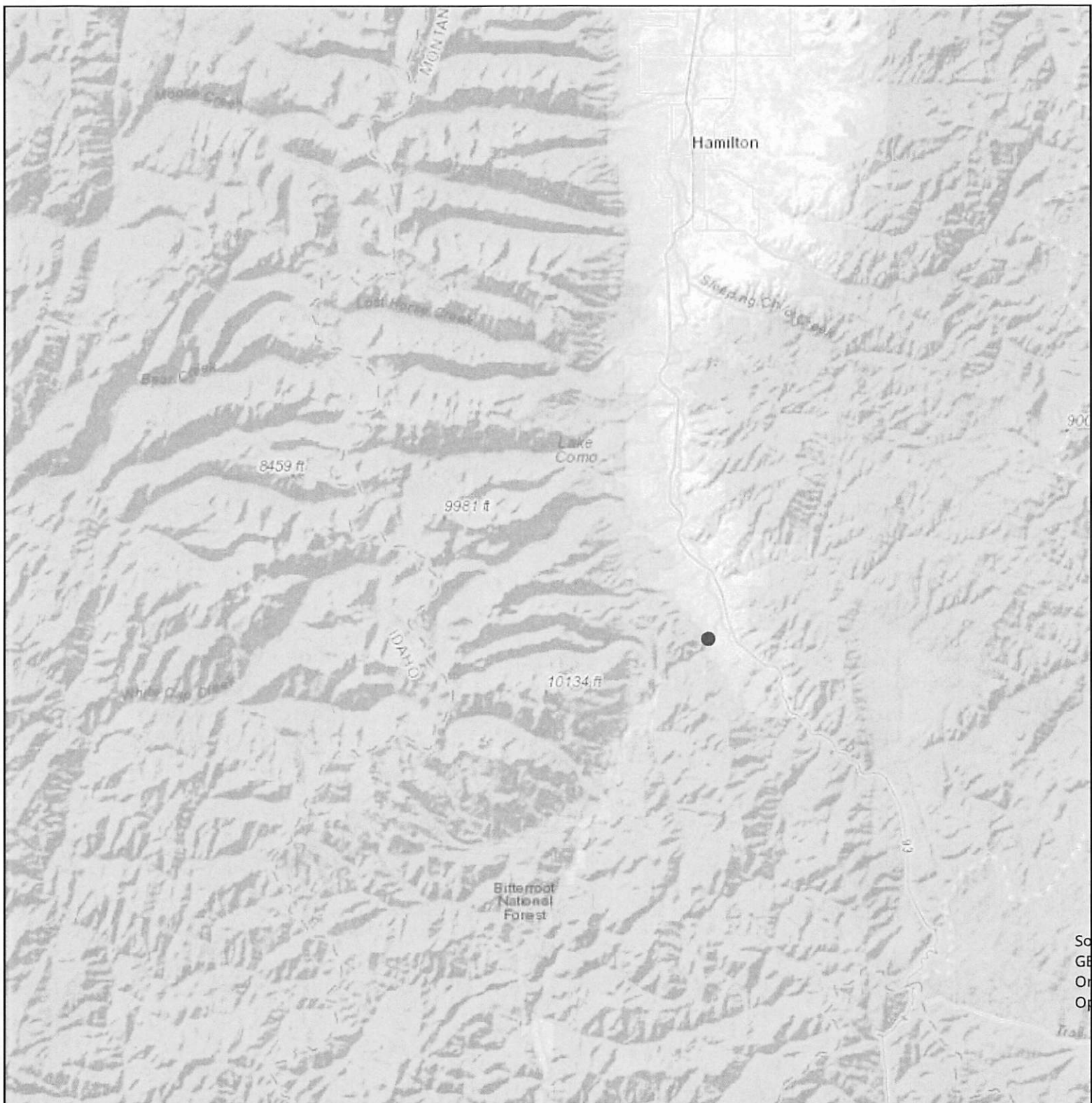
Thank you kindly,



Mimi Wolok
Land Conservation Specialist
Lands Unit

PO Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701
(406) 444-4029

cc: Marty Stomberg, FWP Region 2










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C. Ben White Memorial Property Site Plan



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|--|---------------------------------|---|---------------------------|---|----------------------|
|  | Proposed Acquisition (97 acres) |  | Existing Trail (old road) |  | Existing Access Road |
|  | Bitterroot National Forest |  | Proposed New Trails |  | Irrigation Ditch |
|  | New Gravel Parking Area | | | | |

C. Ben White Memorial Fishing Access Site

Legal Description (approximate pending survey)

A tract of land located in the N $\frac{1}{2}$ of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ less highway right of way of Section 13, Township 2 North, Range 21 West, P.M.M., Ravalli County, Montana, containing approximately 78 acres; and

A tract of land located in the N $\frac{1}{2}$ of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ less highway right of way and the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the SE $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 13, Township 2 North, Range 21 West, P.M.M., Ravalli County, Montana, containing 18.949 acres