

Draft Environmental Assessment

**Wick Wildlife Habitat Management Area
Land Exchange, Carbon County, Wyoming**

**Prepared by
US Fish and Wildlife Service
and
Wyoming Game and Fish Department**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acronyms and Abbreviations	1
Introduction	2
Purpose and Need	3
Background.....	3
Alternatives	6
Alternative A.....	6
Alternative B.....	7
Other Alternatives Considered.....	7
Affected Environment	7
Physical Resources.....	7
Soils.....	7
Water.....	8
Biological Resources.....	8
Vegetation.....	8
Federally Listed Species.....	9
Other Wildlife Species.....	10
Sport Fisheries.....	11
Historic and Cultural Resources.....	11
Recreation.....	12
Social and Economic Factors.....	12
Environmental Consequences	12
Alternative A.....	12
Alternative B.....	13
Cumulative Impacts.....	13
Conclusion.....	14
Public Comments	17
Preparers	18
References	19
Appendix A	20
Appendix B	20

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

BCCC	Bear Creek Cattle Company
BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CFS	Cubic Feet per Second
EA	Environmental Assessment
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
IBH	Iron Bar Holdings, LLC. (Iron Bar Ranch)
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
SHP	Strategic Habitat Plan
OSLI	Office of State Lands and Investments
USFS	US Forest Service
USFWS	US Fish and Wildlife Service
WGFC	Wyoming Game and Fish Commission
WGFD	Wyoming Game and Fish Department
WHMA	Wildlife Habitat Management Area
WRA	Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937
WSFR	Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program

INTRODUCTION

This Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared to analyze the environmental effects of a proposed land exchange between the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission (WGFC) and Iron Bar Holdings, LLC (IBH). The proposed exchange includes a parcel of land acquired with other lands at the WGFC's Wick Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA), and a parcel of land owned by IBH adjacent to the WHMA.

Because the Wick WHMA parcel was acquired with partial funding through the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program (WSFR) under terms of the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937 (WRA), the proposed exchange project constitutes a Federal action that is subject to evaluation by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This EA is an assessment of potential impacts that could result with the implementation of either the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative. It is anticipated the EA will provide rationale for USFWS to make a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). If significant impacts are determined to be the result of the proposed action, the USFWS may require that an environmental impact statement be prepared.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The Wick WHMA was acquired for the conservation and enhancement of elk (*Cervus canadensis*) winter range by the WGFC. Portions of the WHMA were acquired with funding assistance from the USFWS under grant number W-77-L-1. The WHMA is managed by the WGFD for wildlife purposes and for public recreation.

An isolated parcel of Wick WHMA lands containing 160 acres, more or less, is located outside the boundary of the WHMA adjacent to lands owned by Iron Bar Holdings, LLC (IBH) as is depicted on (Figure 1). The parcel is located two miles southwest of the WHMA's southern boundary. There is no legal public access to the parcel, and therefore, it has been difficult to manage and maintain the parcel for the purposes of its acquisition. Wildlife values on the parcel are considered to be marginal due to lack of quality of crucial winter range.

An IBH parcel, also containing 160 acres, more or less is located adjacent to the southern boundary of the WHMA (Figure 1). The parcel has been offered in exchange for the isolate Wick WHMA parcel. In addition, access through the IBH parcel will provide public access to thousands of acres of state and federal lands. Wildlife values on the parcel are considered to be superior to those on the Wick WHMA exchange parcel.

The environmental effects of the proposed exchange are detailed within this report.

Background

Wick WHMA - Purpose of Exchange and Primary Goals:

- A. Provide winter range for big game species, specifically elk and deer.**
- B. Provide hunting, fishing, and recreational use of the wildlife resource.**
- C. Manage the area as a good land steward and for all native species of wildlife.**
- D. Protect department property rights.**
- E. Manage area cost effectively, efficiently, and within goals and objectives of the Department's Strategic Habitat Plan (SHP).**

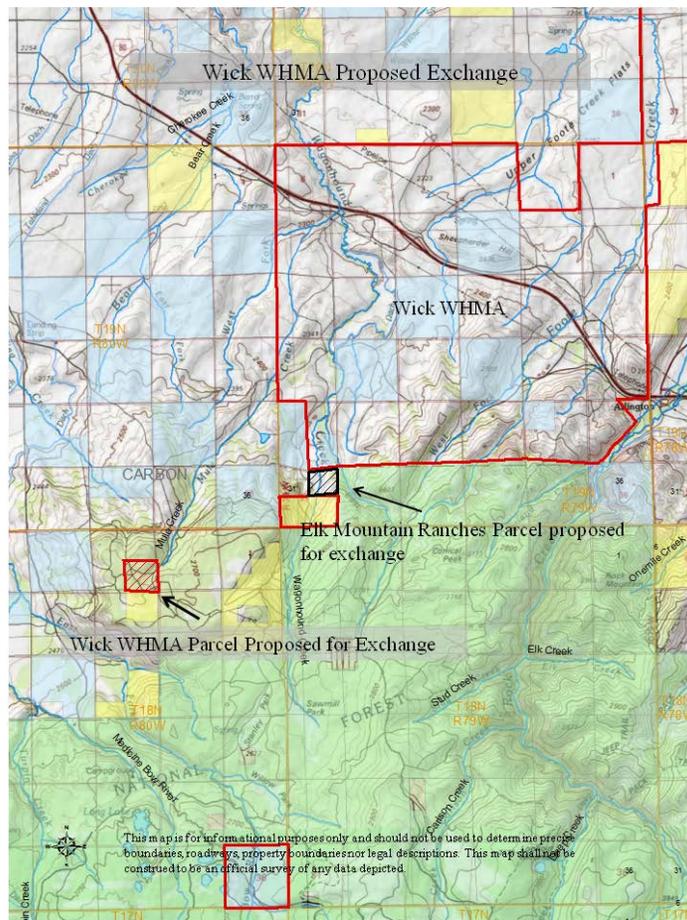
The Wick WHMA is located approximately six miles southeast of Elk Mountain and five miles west of Arlington in Carbon County. The original WHMA acquisition included approximately 8,969 (eight thousand nine hundred sixty nine) acres, purchased in the early 1960s, primarily to provide winter range for elk that spend summer in the adjacent Medicine Bow National Forest.

Subsequent WHMA acquisitions included a 1988 purchase of approximately 1,375 (one thousand three hundred seventy five) acres of quality wildlife habitat and acquisition of approximately 8,549 (eight thousand five hundred forty nine) acres of permanent public access from the Bear Creek Cattle Company (BCCC). The WHMA currently consists of 22,060 (twenty two thousand sixty) acres of land, including 10,344 (ten thousand three hundred forty four) acres of fee title, 2,880 (two thousand eight hundred eighty) acres leased from the Office of

State Lands and Investments (OSLI), 287 (two hundred eighty seven) acres of federal lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the 8,549 (eight thousand five hundred forty nine acres of permanent public access acquired from BCCC.

While the WHMA was purchased to implement long-range conservation of quality winter range for local elk herds, the acquisition has also provided conservation of valuable mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*) and pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*) habitat. The Wick WHMA provides public access to adjacent federal and state lands for hunting, fishing, and other recreational pursuits in an area where demand for access and open space for outdoor recreational pursuits is high.

Figure 1. Map of Parcels Proposed for Exchange



Current management of the WHMA includes irrigation of hayfields and wet meadows for elk, other big game species, and numerous species of small and upland wildlife. It is also managed for hunting, fishing, camping, and other recreational activities. Quality fishing can be found on almost 10 miles of streams on the Wagonhound and Foote Creek drainages. In addition, three small man-made reservoirs provide almost two surface acres for public fishing. The WHMA is

closed to human presence each year from November 16 through May 31 to avoid disturbance to wintering wildlife.

A Class III Cultural Resource Inventory was completed for the WGFD parcel by LTA, Inc. on August 3, 2010. Survey results indicated no cultural material exists on the parcel. A copy of the report is attached in the Appendix A.

The WGFD and IBH parcels were appraised by McCarty Land & Water Valuation, Inc. on June 24, 2014. The appraisal determined the properties to be of equal value. A copy of the appraisal has been submitted to the USFWS.

Exchange of the Wick WHMA parcel was evaluated by WGFD biologists and administrators for many years, and it was determined the exchange will enhance management and monitoring of the WHMA. The WGFC supports the exchange.

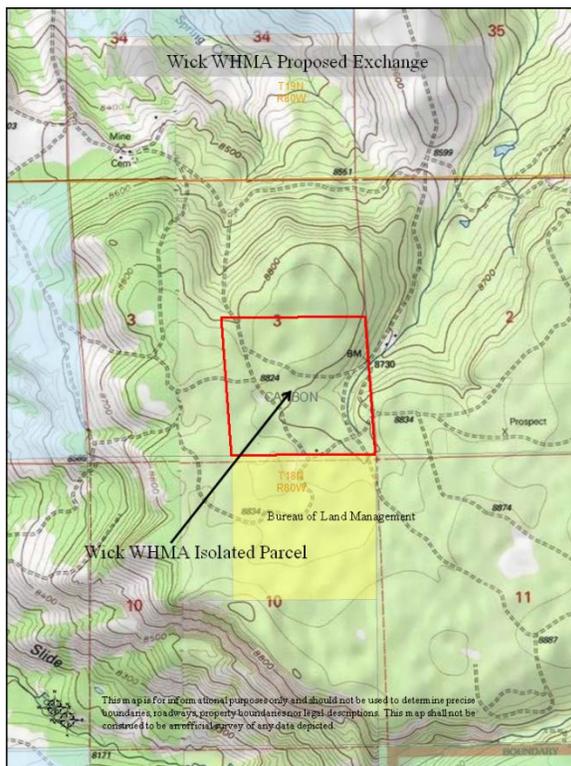
Background – WGFD Parcel

Proposed for exchange is an isolated 160 acre parcel of Wick WHMA lands, more particularly described as the southeast quarter of Section 3, Township 18 North, Range 80 west. It was acquired with the original Wick purchase, with federal assistance funding.

The WGFD parcel is surrounded on three sides by private lands, and by BLM administered lands along a portion of the southern boundary. The BLM parcel is also 160 acres, and is isolated among private lands on all other borders. There is no legal public access to these parcels.

Figure 2 – Wick Isolated Parcel

Figure 2 – Wick Isolated Parcel Aerial Map

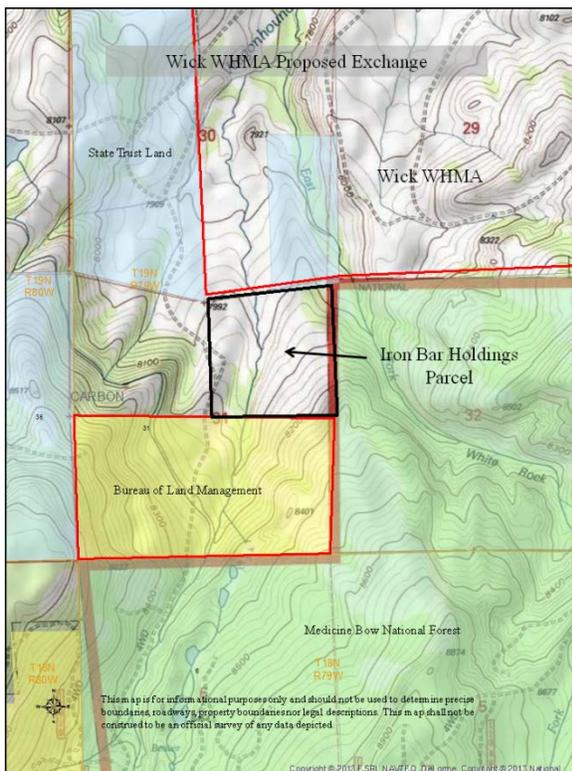




Background – IBH Parcel

Proposed for exchange is an isolated 160 acre parcel of IBH lands, more particularly described as the northeast quarter of Section 31, Township 19 North, Range 79 West. IBH owns and operates other lands in the area.

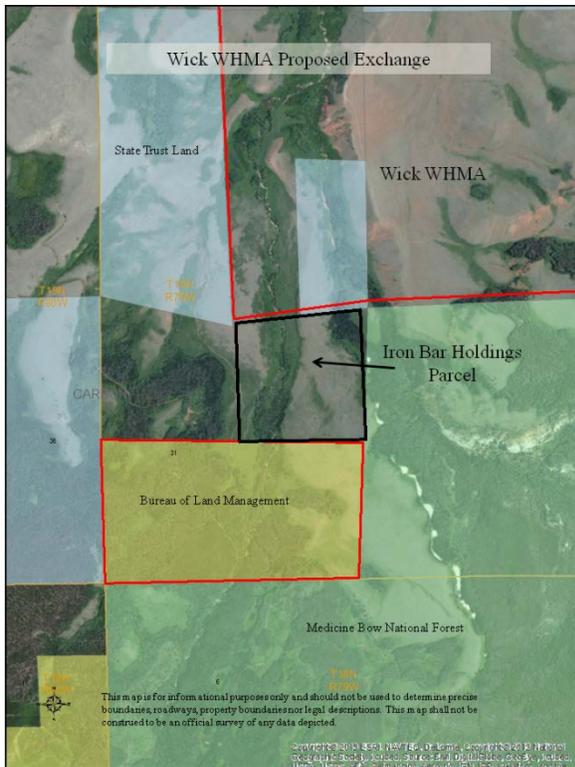
The parcel is bounded by the Wick WHMA to the north, BLM administered lands to the south, and federal lands administered by the US Forest Service (USFS) as part of the Medicine Bow National Forest to the east, and south of the BLM adjacent parcel (Figure 1). Access through the parcel would improve public access to thousands of acres of public lands.



The IBH parcel is encumbered with a permanent conservation easement to the Wyoming Stock Growers Agricultural Land Trust (WSGALT).

Figure 4 – IBH Parcel

Figure 5 – IBH Parcel – Aerial Map



ALTERNATIVES

Alternative A: Exchange of WGFD and IBH Parcels (Preferred Alternative)

Under this alternative, WGFD and IBH will complete a direct exchange of 160 acre parcels. The parties will agree to secure and pay for title insurance and document recording fees for their property being conveyed to the other party. They will also agree to share costs of any closing fees charged by a mutually agreed upon title insurance company, and to equally share any other fees associated with closing. Each party will accept the exchanged properties in ‘as is’ condition, and no repairs to any improvements or to the property will be provided by either party.

The WGFD and IBH parcels were appraised by McCarty Land & Water Valuation, Inc. on June 24, 2014. The appraisal determined the properties to be of equal value. A copy of the appraisal has been submitted to the USFWS.

The exchange will be subject to final evaluation and approval by the WGFC.

Alternative B: No Action

Under this alternative, the WGFD and IBH would not exchange any lands or property rights. Management of the parcels would not change, and public access would not improve.

Other Alternatives Considered but Dismissed from Further Analysis

Other alternatives have been considered but dismissed from additional analysis because they were determined not to be acceptable or feasible by one or both of the parties, or they otherwise did not meet the goals of the parties. Other exchange options were considered, as were direct purchases of the parcels. No other exchange offer matched the benefits of the current proposal. Purchase of fee lands by WGFC has been complicated by lack of required funds.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Wick WHMA Parcel

The legal description of the Wick WHMA parcel is below. Refer to Figure 1 for parcel location.

Township 18 North, Range 80 West of the 6th P.M., Carbon County, Wyoming
Section 3: SE1/4

The IBH Parcel

The legal description of the Wick WHMA parcel is below. Refer to Figure 1 for parcel location.

Township 19 North, Range 79 West of the 6th P.M., Carbon County, Wyoming
Section 31: NE1/4

Physical Resources

Soils

The Wick WHMA is comprised of a variety of topographic features including high rolling hills, gravel terraces, benches, rocky outcrops, and steep slopes. Elevations range from approximately 8,900 (eight thousand nine hundred feet in the foothills along the eastern boundary of the WHMA to 7,263 seven thousand two hundred sixty-three feet in areas associated with Wagonhound, Foote, and Mule creeks.

Wick WHMA and IBH soils are primarily loamy to shallow loamy, with rocky outcrops. There is no NRCS soil survey data available for Carbon County. There appear to be no prime or unique soils associated with either parcel.

Water

The primary water source on the Wick WHMA is Wagonhound Creek, which originates in the Medicine Bow Mountains near Arlington, and flows northerly through the WHMA before joining with the Medicine Bow River. Other streams located on the WHMA include Foote Creek and Mule Creek. The WGFC holds valid water rights for 900 acres from the Carlson Canal and 667 acres from Wagonhound Creek. Approximately 1,056 acres on the WHMA are irrigated for wildlife use. The WGFC also acquired an instream flow right for 8.5 miles of Wagonhound Creek with a flow rate of 1.2 to 1.545 CFS for fish habitat enhancement.

A short stretch of Mule Creek flows through a small portion of the Wick WHMA exchange parcel, while Wagonhound Creek flows through the entirety of the IBH parcel. Mule Creek is an intermittent stream with dry stretches during summer months and is considered to maintain poor quality fish habitat.

Biological Resources

Vegetation

The Wick WHMA is characterized by a fairly wide variation of topography and terrain. Vegetation generally ranges from dense timber stands to open grasslands. The majority of the WHMA is comprised of grassland and sagebrush-grassland vegetative types. Other vegetative types include wet meadow, sagebrush, conifer-grassland, willow-riparian, mountain shrub, and aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) stands. Also present on the WHMA are headwater riparian systems associated with Wagonhound Creek and Foote Creek. Those areas of the WHMA with mixed conifer-grassland cover types provide protective cover for wildlife and snow retention zones which improve annual water yield.

Sagebrush-grasslands cover types are characterized by mountain big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), silver sagebrush (*Artemisia cana*), threetip sagebrush (*Artemisia tripartite*), slender wheatgrass (*Elymus trachycaulus*), mountain brome (*Bromus marginatus*), Idaho fescue (*Festuca idahoensis*), Letterman's needlegrass (*Stipa Lettermanii*), and other species. Upland sites support populations of sagebrush species, needle and thread (*Hesperostipa comata*), western wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smitihii*), and bluegrass species. Lodgepole pine (*Pinus conorta*) is abundant in higher elevations, among stands of Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), mountain mahogany (*Cercocarpus montanus*), and aspen. Riparian sites include willow (*Salix spp.*), cottonwood trees (*Populus deltoids*), Nebraska sedge (*Carex nebrascensis*), timothy grass (*Phleum pratense*), and Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*).

The Wick WHMA exchange parcel is densely forested, estimated at 90 percent, with portions impacted by mountain bark beetle infestations. Lodgepole pine trees are the predominate species on the parcel, with smaller stands of spruce and aspen present. A short stretch of Mule Creek flows along the eastern portion of the parcel. Elevations range from 8,704 (eight thousand seven hundred four) feet to 8,822 (eight thousand eight hundred twenty two) feet.

Habitat types on the IBH parcel consist primarily of upland grassland and sagebrush complexes, with some timber and riparian systems associated with Wagonhound Creek. Vegetation includes lodgepole pine, cottonwood trees, willows, sagebrush, antelope bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), western wheatgrass and prairie junegrass (*Koeleria macrantha*). Wagonhound Creek generally bisects the parcel. Elevations range from 7,975 (seven thousand nine hundred seventy five) feet to 8,260 (eight thousand two hundred sixty) feet.

Federally Listed Species

The Wick WHMA has been evaluated for possible presence of black-footed ferrets (*Mustela nigripes*), an endangered species, and greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), a

candidate species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA). Sage-grouse are known to inhabit areas of the WHMA. Portions of the Hanna Core Area are located on the WHMA, but neither parcel proposed for exchange is located within the core area. According to WGFD observation records, no known leks are located on either parcel.

A black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*) survey of the Wick WHMA was completed in April, 1999 by Western EcoSystems Technologies, Inc. for the Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT). WYDOT considered a purchase of WHMA lands for construction of a rest area. White-tailed prairie dog colonies in the vicinity of the proposed WYDOT construction area were surveyed. Researchers found no black-footed ferrets, ferret sign, or unidentified tracks or diggings that could indicate ferret activity. WGFD personnel, including biologists and game wardens provide frequent monitoring of the WHMA, and no sign of black-footed ferret activity has been detected.

The WHMA parcel proposed for exchange is not considered to be suitable habitat for prairie dogs or black-footed ferrets, and no prairie dog colonies or any known black-footed ferret activity has been documented on the parcel.

In 2008, WGFD notified Brian T. Kelley, Field Supervisor, Wyoming USFWS Ecological Field Office, June 13, 2008 (Appendix B) about the proposed exchange and received advice on analysis of the exchange parcel, including information on listed species, migratory birds, wetlands and riparian areas, and sensitive species. More specifically, USFWS advised additional consideration of migratory bird impacts, wetland impacts, North Platte River water depletions, and listed species – Ute Ladies’-tresses (*Spiranthes diluvidulis*), blowout penstemon (*Penstemon haydenii*), and black-footed ferrets.

Due to elevations and habitat conditions, neither plant species is suspected or known to exist on the WGFD exchange parcel. No adverse impacts have been assessed from the proposed action to migratory birds, Platte River water depletions, wetlands, or any of the listed species identified by the USFWS.

Other Wildlife Species

Although the Wick WHMA is managed primarily for elk, a variety of other wildlife species occupy habitats on the WHMA, or migrate through the area. Other species found at various times throughout the year on the Wick WHMA include mule deer, antelope, blue grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*), and sage-grouse), cottontails (*Sylvilagus nuttallii*), waterfowl, coyotes (*Canis latrans*), beavers (*Castor Canadensis*), mountain lions (*Felis concolor*), black bears (*Ursus americanus*), and numerous others. Various species identified in Wyoming’s State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) as Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) are known or suspected to inhabit the Wick WHMA including:

Birds

American three-toed woodpecker	(<i>Picoides tridactylus</i>)
Bald eagle	(<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>)
Boreal owl	(<i>Aeogolius funereus</i>)
Brewer’s sparrow	(<i>Spizella breweri</i>)

Clark's grebe	<i>(Aechmorphus clarkii)</i>
Greater sage-grouse	<i>(Centrocercus urophasianus)</i>
Lewis' woodpecker	<i>(Melanerpes lewis)</i>
Long-billed curlew	<i>(Numenius americanus)</i>
Merlin	<i>(falco columbarius)</i>
Northern Plover	<i>(Chandrius montanus)</i>
Northern goshawk	<i>(Accipter gentilis)</i>
Peregrine falcon	<i>(Falco pereginus)</i>
Pygmy nuthatch	<i>(Sitta pygmaea)</i>
Sage sparrow	<i>(Amphispiza belli)</i>
Sage thrasher	<i>(Oreoscoptes montanus)</i>
Sandhill crane	<i>(Grus Canadensis)</i>
Swainson's hawk	<i>(Buteo swainsoni)</i>
Willow flycatcher	<i>(Empidonax traillii)</i>

Mammals

American marten	<i>(Martes americana)</i>
Big brown bat	<i>(Epetsicus fuscus)</i>
Dwarf shrew	<i>(Sorex nanus)</i>
Little brown myotis	<i>(Myotis lucifungus)</i>
Long-eared myotis	<i>(Myotis evotes)</i>
Long-legged myotis	<i>(Myotis volans)</i>
Moose	<i>(Alces alces)</i>
Olive-backed pocket mouse	<i>(Perognathus faciatus)</i>
Preble's jumping mouse	<i>(Zapus hudsonius preblei)</i>
Pygmy shrew	<i>(Sorex hoyi)</i>
Swift fox	<i>(Vulpes velox)</i>
Vagrant shrew	<i>(Sorex vagrans)</i>

In the 2010 *Wagonhound Creek and Wick WHMA Watershed Assessments* by WGFD, the following fish, amphibian, and reptile species were considered to likely be present within the Wagonhound Creek watershed:

Fish

Brook trout	<i>(Salvelinus fontinalis)</i>
Brown trout	<i>(Salmo trutta)</i>
Creek chub	<i>(Semotilus atromaculatus)</i>
Longnose dace	<i>(Rhinichthys cataractae)</i>
Longnose sucker	<i>(Catostomus catostomus)</i>
Rainbow trout	<i>(Oncorhynchus mykiss)</i>
White sucker	<i>(Catostomus commersoni)</i>

Amphibians

Boreal chorus frog	<i>(Pseudacris maculate)</i>	
Boreal toad	<i>(Anaxyrus boreas boreas)</i>	(SWAP SGCN)
Northern leopard frog	<i>(Lithobates pipiens)</i>	(SWAP) SGCN)
Blotched tiger salamander	<i>(Ambystoma mavortium melanostictum)</i>	
Wood frog	<i>(Lithobates sylvaticus)</i>	(SWAP SGCN)

Reptiles

Greater short-horned lizard	<i>(Phrynosoma hernandesi)</i>	(SWAP SGCN)
Northern sagebrush lizard	<i>(Sceloporus graciosus graciosus)</i>	
Plains garter snake	<i>(Thamnophis radix)</i>	(SWAP SGCN)
Wandering garter snake	<i>(Thamnophis elegans vagrans)</i>	

Sport Fisheries

The Wick WHMA is located within the North Platte River drainage. The primary water source on the Wick WHMA is Wagonhound Creek, a tributary of the Medicine Bow River. Wagonhound Creek supports populations of brook, brown, and rainbow trout at various densities through the WHMA. To help support and maintain the fishery, the WGFC acquired an instream flow right for 8.5 miles of Wagonhound Creek with a flow rate of 1.2 to 1.545 CFS. Quality trout fishing is also available at three small impoundments on the Wick WHMA.

Historic and Cultural Resources

A Class III Cultural Resource Inventory was completed for the WGFD parcel by LTA, Inc. on August 3, 2010. Records search and field inspection results indicated there are no cultural resources on the parcel. A copy of the report is attached in Appendix A.

Recreation

The Wick WHMA is primarily managed for wildlife habitat, but the WHMA is quite popular for a variety of recreational opportunities. Management of the WHMA includes an uncomplicated road system, with sufficient access to most areas without compromising topographic resources and wildlife habitat. It also includes several designated campsites and comfort stations.

Recreation on the WHMA includes hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, biking, antler hunting, wildlife viewing, and more. The WHMA also provided important access routes to adjacent areas of the Medicine Bow National Forest.

The WHMA provides quality opportunities for elk, deer, and pronghorn hunting. Other hunted species include black bear, mountain lion, blue grouse, sage-grouse, and waterfowl.

Wagonhound Creek and ponds located on the WHMA provide cold-water fishing opportunities, and the varied habitat types, wildlife species, and scenic resources provide viewing and

photographic opportunities. The annual reopening of the WHMA generally welcomes a fair number of antler hunters who often wait in long lines at the main gate for the official opening.

Social and Economic Factors

Both parcels included in the exchange proposal are situated in fairly remote locations with low human population densities. Laramie, with an estimated population of 32,000 people is approximately 42 miles east of the Wick WHMA, while Rawlins with less than 10,000 people lies 60 miles to the west. Lands in the area are primarily used for livestock production, energy generation (including wind energy), and recreation. These land uses are responsible for most jobs in the area, and for most of the revenue generated in the area. Hunting, fishing, hiking, and other recreational uses of the Wick WHMA provide significant revenue for local economies in communities like Elk Mountain and Arlington.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Alternative A: Exchange of WGFD and IBH parcels (Preferred Alternative)

The immediate result of Alternative A would be an increase in public access on the Wick WHMA of 160 acres by the acquisition of IBH parcel (since the 160-acre Wick WHMA exchange parcel does not have public access). The exchange will remove the federal nexus from the isolated Wick WHMA parcel and will be attached to the IBH parcel. Hunting, fishing, camping, and other recreational activities are likely to increase in quality and frequency, following the proposed exchange, due to improved public access to public lands south of the Wick WHMA.

Wildlife populations in Wyoming are limited by quantity and quality of habitat. Among the most important habitat are within areas designated as crucial winter range. WGFD considers crucial ranges as the determining factor in a species population's ability to maintain itself at a certain level over the long term. The Wick WHMA exchange parcel has no crucial habitat, while the entire 160 acre IBH parcel has been designated as crucial winter range for elk.

Management of wildlife in Wyoming is greatly influenced by the ability to monitor habitats and populations by WGFD personnel throughout the year. In addition, big game management relies heavily on hunter distribution and harvest success. Increased public access after the proposed exchange will enhance opportunities for wildlife monitoring. It will also help distribute hunters over larger areas and improve harvest success on the Wick WHMA and adjacent public lands.

Social and economic benefits will result from increased public access and recreational opportunities after the exchange.

Alternative B: No Action

Under Alternative B, there would be no exchange of lands. WGFD would continue to expend the extra resources needed to manage the non-contiguous 160 acre parcel for the purposes of the original Wick land acquisitions. Potential costs needed to enhance conservation of the isolated

Wick WHMA parcel could include fencing to restrict unauthorized livestock uses, and to enforce the seasonal closure. Additional signing and increased monitoring of the parcel is also the result of the No Action alternative. Anticipated public access benefits from the proposed exchange would not be realized.

Cumulative Impacts

Cumulative impacts are the consequences that may result from the effects of the proposed action when added to other past, present, and potential future actions. Consequences of future actions must be considered to be reasonable based on current information. Considered for the Wick WHMA exchange parcel are the cumulative impacts to the overall management of the Wick WHMA, wildlife and habitat resources, public access, and development.

Cumulative Impacts – Wick WHMA Management

Alternative A - Under the preferred Alternative A, cumulative impacts to Wick WHMA management, after disposal of the isolated parcel, are estimated to be positive.

The IBH parcel can be effectively and efficiently managed with the Wick WHMA by WGFD. The parcel is not subject to influences of the agricultural and residential uses of surrounding landowners as is the case with the Wick WHMA isolated parcel. In addition, the Wick WHMA seasonal closure can be effectively enforced.

Alternative B – The No Action alternative will likely insure the current level of management and monitoring of the Wick WHMA exchange parcel not change.

Cumulative Impacts – Wildlife and Habitat

Alternative A - Potential impacts to wildlife and habitat resources on the Wick WHMA exchange parcel under Alternative A are anticipated to be minimal over the short term, as uses of the parcel for wildlife habitat and livestock grazing are not expected to change. Long term impacts could include significant changes in land use and management of the parcel under private ownership. In the recent appraisal of the parcel, legal and physical access issues were considered to limit potential uses of the parcel. The appraiser considered the highest and best use of the property to be continued agricultural and recreational use. The current access limitations may change over time, and habitat and wildlife resources on the Wick WHMA exchange parcel may be subject to change.

Under Alternative A, cumulative wildlife and habitat conditions on remaining Wick WHMA lands are expected to improve with the addition of the IBH parcel with its higher quality habitat.

Alternative B - As previously discussed, wildlife and habitat values on the Wick WHMA exchange parcel are considered marginal and to be inferior to those present on the IBH exchange parcel because the parcel does not provide quality elk winter range. Under Alternative B, the No Action alternative, there should be no short-term impacts to wildlife and habitat conditions on the Wick WHMA exchange parcel. If private access routes to the parcel were to improve, surrounding areas could be developed, and wildlife and habitat resources on the parcel could be diminished due to lack of migration routes to and from the parcel, and to increased human disturbance from surrounding lands.

Cumulative Impacts – Public Access

Alternative A - The Wick WHMA exchange parcel is currently not accessible for public or administrative uses. Under either alternative, all access to and from the parcel will remain under the control of surrounding landowners.

Public access to state and federal lands in the region will be greatly enhanced if the IBH parcel was exchanged under Alternative A.

Alternative B - Without the exchange, public access to the Wick WHMA exchange parcel will not change until surrounding landowners agree granting access. Acquiring public access to the parcel could be expensive and time consuming. Past efforts by WGFD to acquire access through private lands to the parcel have been unsuccessful.

Cumulative Impacts– Development

Alternative A - Potential for development of the Wick WHMA exchange parcel under the preferred alternative, the proposed exchange, is likely to increase under private ownership.

Alternative B - Under this alternative, the parcel will most likely remain undeveloped, but will remain highly influenced by development on adjacent lands.

Conclusion

Wildlife habitat values and public access on the Wick exchange parcel are considered inferior to those present on the IBH exchange parcel. The isolated and inaccessible Wick WHMA exchange parcel is difficult to effectively or efficiently manage with the whole of the WHMA. The parcel is not fenced, and is therefore subject to private recreation and management practices in place on surrounding lands. Future homesite development on surrounding private lands, or fence construction on adjacent boundary lines could render the parcel unappealing or inaccessible to most wildlife. Finally, management of the parcel for public recreational uses is difficult to monitor and improve due to its isolated and inaccessible location.

WGFC and WGFD consider the acquisition of the IBH parcel to enhance overall management and wildlife resources on the Wick WHMA. The exchange will also greatly enhance public access opportunities on the WHMA and adjacent expanses of state and federal lands.

Table 1 – Summary of Proposed Alternatives

	Alternative A – Preferred Action	Alternative B – No Action
WSFR “Federal Nexus”	Federal interests will be removed from 160 acres at the current Wick WHMA, and relocated to the 160 acres IBH parcel.	No change.
Wick WHMA Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management on the current 160 acre Wick WHMA parcel will end, and management on the 160 acre IBH parcel will begin. - The IBH parcel will be managed along with other contiguous Wick WHMA lands for wildlife benefit and 	No change. Management on the Wick WHMA parcel continues to be difficult, and lands uses continue to be subject to uses of surrounding lands.

	public use.	
Wildlife and Habitat	Wick WHMA gains 160 acres of crucial elk winter range, and one quarter mile of quality riparian habitat along Wagonhound Creek.	No change. The Wick WHMA parcel is not designated as crucial wildlife habitat by WGFD.
Public Access	- Wick WHMA gains 160 acres of public access. - Public access through the IBH parcel increases on thousands of acres on adjacent federal lands.	No change. Use of the Wick WHMA parcel remains unavailable to the general public.
Development	The Wick Parcel may be subject to development.	No change. Use and development of surrounding private lands may impact the ability to use the Wick WHMA parcel for wildlife habitat in the future.

Public Review

A public notice for the land exchange was published in the Casper Star Tribune and the Rawlins Daily Times for four consecutive weeks beginning on Thursday, August 7th and repeating on August 14th, August 21st, and August 28th. No public comment was received.

The land exchange was also advertised on the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission agenda and discussed in public open session at the Commission meetings on July 7, 2014, and September 19, 2014. At each meeting prior to taking action, the Commission requested public comment and no public comments were offered

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APPENDIX A