

5 Coordination and Environmental Review



USFWS

Rocky Mountain Front Advisory Council.

The Service coordinated within the agency, as well as with other federal agencies and local agencies, while developing this EA. Coordination efforts for contaminants and hazardous materials is described below.

The Service conducted this environmental analysis under the authority of the National Environmental Policy Act. The resulting document will be distributed to the project mailing list, and copies can be requested.

The analysis and documentation was prepared by a combination of field and regional Service staff, along with partners (see appendix C). Appendix D contains the finding of no significant impact, appendix E contains the environmental action statement, appendix F contains the environmental compliance certificate, and appendix G contains the section 7 biological evaluation. Director's memorandums are appendix H.

AGENCY COORDINATION

The Service has discussed the proposal to expand the Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Area with landowners; conservation organizations; other federal agencies; tribal, state, and county governments; and other interested groups and individuals.

The Service held an open house public meeting to provide information and discuss the proposal with landowners and other interested citizens. Information on the Rocky Mountain Front project area has been made available to county commissioners in each of the three counties included in the project area.

At the federal level, the Service staff has briefed Senators Baucus and Tester, as well as the congressional delegation, and coordinated with representatives from other federal agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service. At the state level, Governor Schweitzer's staff, along with the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, was briefed on the project. In addition, the Service provided information to the Blackfoot Tribe on this project.

Nongovernmental conservation groups are vital to the success of the proposed expansion project. Service staff has coordinated with partner organizations such as The Nature Conservancy, The Montana Land Reliance, and the Rocky Mountain Front Land Owner Advisory Council.

Appendix I lists the comments and responses from the public review.

CONTAMINANTS AND HAZARDOUS MATERIALS

Fieldwork for the pre acquisition contaminant surveys will be conducted, on a tract-by-tract basis, prior to the purchase of any land interest. Any suspected problems or contaminants requiring additional surveys will be referred to a contaminants specialist located in the Service's ecological services office in Helena, Montana.

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

As a federal agency, the Service must comply with provisions of NEPA. An EA is required under NEPA to evaluate reasonable alternatives that will meet stated objectives, and to assess the possible impacts to the human environment. The EA serves as the basis for determining whether implementation of the proposed action will constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment.

The analysis for, and development of this EA, facilitated the involvement of government agencies and the public in the decision making process.

LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION COOPERATIVES

The Service will use landscape conservation cooperatives as a means to reach across broad landscapes, involve many partners, and function at a scale necessary to address wildlife adaptation in response to climate change.

The Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Area lies within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative (GNLCC) (see figure 5). GNLCC includes the mountain and transitional habitats in regions of Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and the upper Green River basin in southern Wyoming and small parts of Colorado and Utah, and portions of the Interior Columbia Plateau reaching into Oregon and Washington westward to the Cascade Mountains. The GNLCC also includes the international landscapes of the interior British Columbia and Alberta, Canada, and covers the entirety of the northern Rocky Mountains and mid-continent lowlands of the interior northwest.

The GNLCC has identified priority species including: bull trout, grizzly bear, Lewis' woodpecker, trumpeter swan, cutthroat trout, Arctic grayling, wolverine, willow flycatcher, sage grouse, burrowing owl, and Columbia spotted frog.



Figure 5. Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative with Rocky Mountain Front Conservation Area expansion.

The GNLCC works with a variety of science partners including many of which are also supporters of the proposed expansion of the easement project. The protection of the Front, through an expansion of the conservation easement project would significantly contribute to the conservation of GNLCC priority habitats and the federal trust species identified above.

As the GNLCC continues to develop, an overarching priority will be to serve as a convening body to bring together partners to address existing and future issues related to climate change and landscape scale conservation. The Service will work with existing partnerships within the Rocky Mountain Front to further refine priorities and leverage resources for acquisition.

DISTRIBUTION AND AVAILABILITY

Copies of the EA were sent to federal and state legislative delegations, agencies, landowners, private groups, and other interested individuals.

Additional copies of the document are available from the following offices and websites.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge Complex
922 Bootlegger Trail
Great Falls, MT 59404-6133
406 / 727 7400
<http://www.fws.gov/bentonlake>

and

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Region 6, Division of Refuge Planning
Branch of Land Protection Planning
P.O. Box 25486–DFC
Denver, Colorado 80225
303 / 236 4378
303 / 236 4792 fax
<http://mountain-prairie.fws.gov/planning/lpp.htm>