

**SUPPLEMENT TO THE
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
AND DECISION FOR REPLACEMENT NORTHWEST MONTANA WETLAND
MANAGEMENT DISTRICT ADMINISTRATIVE FACILITIES**

**NORTHWEST MONTANA WETLAND MANAGEMENT DISTRICT AND NATIONAL
WILDLIFE REFUGES
*LAKE COUNTY, MONTANA***

In March 2022, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) proposed to construct replacement administrative facilities for the management of the Northwest Montana Wetland Management District (NWMT WMD), Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Pablo NWR, Lost Trail NWR, and Swan River NWR due to the transfer of the current Bison Range facilities to the Confederate Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT). The new administrative facilities proposal included a multipurpose building, shop, storage, three residences, and associated roads and utilities. On June 13, 2022, the Service signed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on June 13, 2022, selecting Alternative E, providing for the acquisition of land in the Mission Valley for constructing these facilities and for potentially increasing conservation land using Land and Water Conservation Funds and Migratory Bird Conservation Funds.

After the signing of the June 2022 FONSI, the Service worked diligently to acquire a land parcel in the Mission Valley suitable for the construction of new administrative facilities. The Service staff engaged realtors and property owners about the government acquisition process, looked at 26 properties, and showed interest on 15 of those. Appraised offers were placed on three properties. However, the Service was unable to acquire any of these properties.

Although the 2022 FONSI also identified Alternative C (Crow Waterfowl Production Area) for construction of facilities should a suitable land parcel not be available for acquisition, the Service determined that its criteria for siting the facilities could be broadened to assess building on one of the agency's other existing fee title properties in addition to Alternative C. Accordingly, this Environmental Assessment (EA) Supplement evaluates five additional Waterfowl Production Areas (WPA) in the Mission Valley for the construction of NWMT WMD facilities. These WPAs include Duck Haven, Johnson 80, Kickinghorse, Montgomery, and Sandmark.

Construction for the proposed project will impact less than 12 acres of land. The potential impacts of this additional alternative were evaluated by the Service in an EA Supplement (March 2024).

Selected Action

Construct New Facilities on Montgomery WPA

Montgomery WPA was not initially analyzed as an alternative because of concern that the footprint of the new facilities could not be situated on the WPA and meet the identified siting criteria. However, the Service has since redesigned the construction footprint so that it could be accommodated in on less than 12 acres. The redesigned facilities will include a maintenance shop, a multi-purpose building, and cold and warm storage facilities, and one residence (instead of two as previously proposed).

Construction of the new facilities at the Montgomery WPA will fill the Service needs while preserving the open space, wetlands, wildlife habitat, public recreation areas, and conservation lands on the other WPAs in the NWMT WMD. In addition, the Service is committed to further reducing the size of the footprint for the replacement facilities, if possible.

Also, the Service is committed to work towards the acquisition of new conservation land within Lake County regardless of the alternative implemented.

Other Alternatives Considered and Analyzed in the Final EA

The Final EA, released in March 2022, evaluated the potential environmental impacts associated with five alternatives, including the no action alternative. Three of the alternatives were WPAs located in the Mission Valley, including Anderson, Crow, and Herak (Alternatives B, C, and D, respectively). Alternative E was the acquisition of property not currently owned by the Service.

Summary of Effects of the Selected Actions

An EA Supplement (March 2024) was prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. This EA Supplement evaluated the effects associated with Alternative F. It is incorporated as part of this finding.

Per established protocol with the boundaries of the Flathead Indian Reservation, the Service consulted with the CSKT Tribal Historic Preservation Officer (THPO) regarding compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. The THPO found no cultural concerns for cultural resources at this time and a letter of concurrence was received from the THPO on June 17, 2024.

Implementation of the proposed action at the Montgomery WPA would be expected to result in the following environmental, social, and economic effects. Long-term adverse impacts are expected within the 12-acre project area to wildlife habitat and populations, hunting, and wildlife observation. However, long-term benefits are expected for wildlife habitat and populations, wildlife observation, education, and interpretation outside of the project area. The Service concluded that construction and operation of the proposed facilities would have no effect on the Yellow billed cuckoo, Spalding's catchfly, Canada lynx, and monarch butterfly. In addition, the proposed project may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the grizzly bear.

Constructing the proposed facilities at Montgomery WPA would be consistent with the mission of the NWMT WMD. Increased traffic would occur on Olsen and Logan roads with the presence of a maintenance shop, multi-purpose building, and a residence. However, staffing would be less than ten on a daily basis (some of which would be seasonal hires). Furthermore, the facilities will not serve as a visitor center. As a result, the increased traffic generated by the proposed new facilities would have minimal impact on local residents and road use.

The placement of a groundwater well in this aquifer would support the needs of the new facility. Water use by the staff (less than ten, including seasonal hires), would be minimal and not affect groundwater supply. As previously stated, wetlands would be avoided during siting and construction of the proposed facilities. The Service would also likely enhance these wetlands. In

addition, any irrigation or flood control structures on the property would be avoided during planning, construction, and operation of the facilities.

Measures to mitigate and/or minimize adverse effects have been incorporated into the selected action and are the same as identified in the June 13, 2022 FONSI for soil erosion and sediment control and soil stabilization. In addition, following Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification requirements for new facilities and complying with bird collision deterrence; identifying and avoiding all wetlands and other significant hydrological area during site selection and construction; halting construction and notifying regional archeologist and the CSKT Tribal Historic Preservation Office if paleontological, archeological, or historical remains are encountered; combining multiple buildings or reducing the size and number of buildings when possible to decrease the impact area; and working with the Lake County Roads Departments to direct visitation traffic on paved roads and update signage.

While refuges, by their nature, are unique areas protected for conservation of fish, wildlife and habitat, the proposed action at the Montgomery WPA will not have a significant impact on refuge resources and uses for the same reasons identified in the June 13, 2022 FONSI.

Public Review

Between March 4 and April 3, 2024, the Service made the Draft EA Supplement available for public review and comment. The Service received comments from four non-governmental organizations and 63 individuals. The comments generally opposed Alternative F with many of the commenters concerned that WPA properties should be used for the preservation of wildlife habitat rather than for new facilities. Other comments identified the traffic, noise, and dust that the facilities would bring to a rural setting. Commenters also pointed out that the proposed facilities on Montgomery WPA would conflict with existing agricultural irrigation ditches and the Flathead Indian Irrigation Project. See Appendix B of the Final EA Supplement for responses to comments.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon a review and evaluation of the information contained in the EA Supplement as well as other documents and actions of record affiliated with this proposal, the Service has determined that the proposal to construct new facilities on the Montgomery WPA does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment under the meaning of section 102 (2) (c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (as amended). As such, an environmental impact statement is not required.

Decision

The Service has decided to construct new administrative facilities on the Montgomery WPA in order to continue the management and improvement of the conservation lands entrusted to the Service in northwest Montana.

This action is compatible with the purpose and the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

The action is consistent with applicable laws and policies.

Title

Date