



Region 2
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804
April 12, 2019

Citizens Advisory Board
Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust
PO Box 1993
Helena, MT 59624

Subject: *WW White Memorial FAS Acquisition Project*--application for MFWCT 2019 Grant

Dear Citizens Advisory Board,

Please consider Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks' (FWP) accompanying grant application request for funding from the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust. FWP is proposing to acquire 100 acres of forest and river-bottom habitat on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River in west-central Montana, to develop it as the WW White Memorial Fishing Access Site (FAS). The current property owners have a strong desire to see the property in public ownership and are willing to sell the land at a price well below the appraised value to make sure the conservation and recreational values of the property are permanently protected.

This property encompasses a fantastic mosaic of habitat types along the West Fork of the Bitterroot River that provides habitat for a range of game animals as well as birds, amphibians, and furbearers. The portion of the river that flows through the property is an angler's dream water, with side channels and log jams begging to be explored with a fly or lure. The entire property is full of sign of elk, moose, deer and wild turkeys, and the upland portion of the property would enhance access to beautiful public lands in the Bitterroot National Forest.

We believe the WW White Memorial FAS project aligns perfectly with the mission of the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust—it is a worthy project not only for fish and wildlife habitat, but also for a variety of public outdoor recreational activities.

Thank you for your time and consideration for this proposal. Please feel free to contact Torrey Ritter, Nongame Wildlife Biologist in FWP Region 2 (406-552-5551, torrey.ritter@mt.gov) with questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Randy Arnold
Regional Supervisor

RA:sr

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HABITAT AND RECREATIONAL ACCESS PROJECT FORMS

1. **Project Title:** WW White Memorial Fishing Access Site Acquisition
2. **Project Description:** The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP), with support from the Bitterroot Land Trust (BRLT), is requesting a grant from the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust (MFWCT) to complete a fee-title acquisition of 100 acres for the proposed WW White Memorial Fishing Access Site on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River in west-central Montana. The proposed Fishing Access Site (FAS) acquisition would advance the purpose of the MFWCT by:
 - a. Protecting important aquatic habitat in the West Fork of the Bitterroot River (West Fork) as well as a robust and diverse riparian area in the river floodplain.
 - b. Conserving critical wildlife habitat consisting of riparian forest, floodplain, and upland ponderosa pine forests while maintaining a significant movement corridor between U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands and the West Fork river bottom.
 - c. Enhancing fishing, floating, wildlife-watching, camping, swimming, hiking, and picnicking opportunities along the West Fork, as well as a wide variety of hunting opportunities for big game, grouse, waterfowl, and turkeys.
 - d. Adding 100 acres of public land via a FAS for public use as well as developing a new upland access point that will provide opportunities for hunting and other recreation on USFS lands along Highway 473 that are currently difficult to access due to limited parking and steep terrain.
3. **Project Location:** The property is located at the mouth of the West Fork river canyon. The West Fork is a popular recreation corridor used for floating, fishing, hunting, hiking, and camping. The property is approximately 7.5 miles south of the town of Darby in Ravalli County (FWP Region 2). Montana Highway 473 (West Fork Road) bisects the property, separating the river-bottom portion from the upland portion of the property. The Conner Cutoff Road runs east-west along the northern edge of the river-bottom portion of the property. The western and southern edges of the property are adjacent to USFS lands in the Bitterroot National Forest while all other boundaries are adjacent to private lands. The property is located in the following section: Township 2 North, Range 21 W; Section 13.

4. **Submitted By:** Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, 3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804.

The primary contact for this application packet is:

Torrey Ritter
Nongame Wildlife Biologist
FWP Region 2
3201 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804
torrey.ritter@mt.gov
406-542-5551

5. **Coordinated With:**

- a. Bitterroot Land Trust (BRLT) has supported project design and development thus far, and will continue to support project development, fundraising, and outreach.
- b. The property is privately owned by Donald E. White, Martha J. Stomberg and Barbara S. Dickman, as tenants in common. Martha (aka “Marty”) is the lead representative for the landowners. Her mailing address is 325 Leavens Road, Darby, MT 59829 and her phone number is (406) 381-1327.

6. **Project Type:** The proposed project will be a land acquisition for incorporation into the Fishing Access Site program in FWP Region 2. The project will cover recreational access, habitat improvements, and fisheries enhancements as guided by the purposes outlined for the MFWCT:

- a. **Conserve fisheries habitat, including riparian habitat:** Over one-half mile of the West Fork flows through the property, with 80 acres of associated riparian habitat including 68 acres of mixed cottonwood and ponderosa pine riparian forest and 12 acres of willow thickets, gravel bars, and river channel in the floodplain. The West Fork is a stronghold for Westslope cutthroat trout, a state Species of Concern, and provides habitat for federally threatened bull trout. The portion of the West Fork within the property is still capable of lateral channel migration due to limited development and a relatively wide floodplain. The movement of the river creates favorable conditions for willow and cottonwood recruitment, develops side channels and backwaters that support diverse aquatic and terrestrial life, and maintains a relatively large and accessible section of river for anglers, floaters, and wildlife-watchers to enjoy.
- b. **Conserve wildlife habitat:** The proposed FAS will provide recreational river access to the West Fork while protecting 100 acres of sensitive and biodiverse habitat types in the Bitterroot Valley. The project area encompasses 68 acres of river-bottom forest that is in pristine condition, with healthy and diverse vegetation communities and an active floodplain

that provides habitat for a wide variety of game and nongame wildlife including many Species of Concern (Appendix A). Riparian areas are some of the most biologically rich yet threatened habitat types in Montana, and western North America as a whole. Additionally, the upland portion of the project area consists of 32 acres of open, large-diameter ponderosa pine forest connected to large swaths of USFS lands in the Bitterroot National Forest. The upland acreage provides a critical movement corridor for game animals moving between high elevation forests and the river bottom and is heavily used by elk and deer in the winter. The property is under imminent threat of development given its prime location in a popular recreation corridor and the access it provides to the river and USFS land. The current landowners have recently received multiple offers from private buyers but opted to give FWP the opportunity to acquire the land instead. FWP's acquisition of the property will permanently protect open space as well as fish and wildlife habitat at the gateway to the West Fork river canyon.

- c. **Enhance public hunting, fishing, and recreation opportunities:** The proposed FAS will provide wide-ranging recreational access including hunting opportunities for big game, grouse, waterfowl, and turkeys as well as fishing, camping, floating, hiking, and wildlife-watching. It is the intent of the Region 2 FAS program to provide significant investment in new infrastructure development including a vault toilet, road maintenance, camp sites, picnic tables, a primitive boat launch, and trails. The West Fork is one of the most popular fishing destinations in western Montana and this FAS will help facilitate balanced use of the river by the public. Additionally, improvements in the upland acreage would include a short, gravel access road leading to a gravel parking area where recreationists will be able to safely park and access broad swaths of USFS lands from West Fork Road (Hwy 473).
- d. **Improve public access to public land:** Securing this property will grant easier and safer access to USFS lands above West Fork Road that are currently difficult to access due to limited parking and steep terrain (see Map 4, Appendix A). The current WW White Memorial FAS is a lease from the landowner that is limited in capacity and recreational opportunity. This is the only access site on the West Fork that is managed by FWP, and therefore acquiring the property on the public's behalf will provide much-needed access to a blue-ribbon trout stream in perpetuity. The current owners of the property have a strong desire to see the land protected and put into the public domain, and they are willing to work with FWP and our partners to make sure a positive outcome for the property is realized.

7. **Management of Properties:** The property will be a fee-title acquisition with FWP being the final holder of the fee-title. The property will be managed by the fisheries division in FWP Region 2 under the Fishing Access Site program.
8. **Size of Project Area:** The total project area is 100 acres, consisting of:
 - a. 0.6 miles of the West Fork of the Bitterroot River including an active floodplain that is ~1,000 feet wide along most of its length.
 - b. 68 acres of river-bottom forested floodplain habitat.
 - c. 32 acres of upland ponderosa pine-dominated forested habitat.
 - d. Approximately three acres of the total project area will be developed for recreational use including a vault toilet, gravel access roads, parking areas, camp sites, and a primitive boat launch.
9. **Implementation Schedule:** FWP and its partners began fundraising in April 2019 with the goal of completing the purchase of this property in June 2020. Improvement to the FAS will occur in subsequent years.
10. **Total Project Cost:** An appraisal of the property was initiated by FWP in 2016 when this project was first proposed as a small acquisition of the currently-leased FAS (appraisal is available upon request). The appraisal determined the river-bottom portion of the property (80 acres) was valued at \$610,000 while the upland portion (20 acres) was valued at \$90,000. FWP and the landowners have agreed to a sale price of \$600,000 for the 100-acre tract, which is a significant discount to the 2016 appraisal value. If we are unable to raise enough funds to meet the purchase price, the landowners have agreed to sell only the 80 acres of river-bottom property for \$450,000. That said, the upland portion of the property is highly valuable in terms of wildlife habitat and movement, and will provide recreational access for hunters, hikers, and wildlife-watchers. Because of these additional benefits, we are committed to the full \$600,000 necessary to acquire all 100 acres and confident that our efforts will be successful.
11. **MFWCT Funds:** FWP is requesting \$150,000 from the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust for acquisition of the proposed FAS. The MFWCT funds would be used for the direct purchase of the property. This level of contribution would be instrumental in directly contributing to the purchase of the property and would likely spur additional investment from potential funding partners (Table 1).

12. Matching/Cooperator Funds:

Table 1. The funding strategy for the acquisition of the proposed WW White Memorial Fishing Access Site on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River includes matching contributions from at least a half-dozen conservation and recreation partners. Below is a list of the prospective partners that we envision helping with this acquisition. Fundraising efforts are now underway, with this application to the Montana Fish & Wildlife Conservation Trust serving as the first public request for funds. MFWCT’s contribution to this project will serve as the critical “first in” gift that will be used to leverage contributions from other partners, many of which require committed matching funds. FWP and BRLT have strong relationships and a history of funding success with all the sources of prospective matching funds listed below. We are confident that we will be able to raise the matching funds necessary to complete this transaction. With that said, it is important to note that list of potential partners and their level of contribution are tentative and subject to change.

Committed and Requested Funding Partners	Funds committed or requested	Funding timeline
Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust (requested)	\$150,000	April 12 th , 2019 application deadline.
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks - Fishing Access Site Program (pending approval)	\$125,000	Funds are earmarked for this project for FY20. Funds will become available 7/1/2019.
Bitterroot Land Trust (committed)	\$25,000 (in-kind)	Essential partnership for project development, outreach, and fundraising efforts.
Stomberg/White Family	\$100,000 (donated)	The landowners have agreed to a purchase price well below the appraised value of the property in order to accommodate FWPs’ acquisition.
Prospective Matching Fund Partners	Anticipated contribution	Funding timeline
Ravalli County Open Lands Bond	\$175,000	Will approach commission with project in fall 2019 with more funding secured.
Sportsperson’s Organizations (Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, local chapters of Trout Unlimited and Audubon Society, National Wild Turkey Federation, Backcountry Horseman, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Ravalli County Fish and Wildlife Association)	\$50,000	Fundraising beginning in April 2019.
Private Contributions Raised by Bitterroot Land Trust	\$100,000	Fundraising beginning in April 2019.
Total	\$600,000	The maximum price paid for the fee-title acquisition of this property will be \$600,000.

13. **Project Objective (s):** The objectives of this project are as follows:

- a. Secure public access to the West Fork and adjacent lands in perpetuity for a wide variety of recreational activities including fishing, hunting, hiking, wildlife-watching, and camping.
- b. Protect critical habitat and movement corridors for both aquatic and terrestrial species.
- c. Maintain a dynamic river floodplain to dissipate energy and sustain fish and wildlife habitats as well as diverse recreational opportunities.
- d. Improve access to adjacent National Forest lands and provide connectivity between upland forests and the river-bottom.

14. **Project Strategies:**

- a. **February 13, 2019:** Project was brought to the FWP Commission on February 13th, 2019 for endorsement to pursue. The project was received favorably and fully endorsed by the Commission.
- b. **September-April 2019:** FWP, BRLT, and landowners met multiple times at BRLT offices and at the property location to develop this project and assess details of an acquisition. Mutual agreement was reached by all parties on the final design and budget for this project in early April.
- c. **May 2019:** At the end of the 2019 legislative session, dollar amounts for the FWP Region 2 FAS program will be in place and funding contributions from the FAS program will be known.
- d. **July 1, 2019:** FAS acquisition funds become available.
- e. **Spring-Fall, 2019:** Joint FWP-BRLT fundraising and outreach efforts.
- f. **Fall 2019:** Assuming initial fundraising efforts are successful, request funds from the Ravalli County Open Lands Bond to help complete the purchase.
- g. **Beginning of 2020:** FWP will develop an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project and take the EA through the FWP Commission's final approval process. FWP tentatively plans to bring the FAS acquisition to the commission for final approval at the April 2020 Commission meeting.
- h. **Summer 2020:** Estimated closing date. FAS would become available for public use.

15. **Area Description:**

- a. Please see the attached maps in Appendix B for an overview of the project area as well as the attached photos of the property in Appendix C.
- b. The property is currently in private ownership and is managed by several family members of the Stomberg/White family. One family member lives on a portion of the property that will

be adjacent to the FAS along its northern boundary, and she is the primary contact that has been working with us to develop this project.

16. **Project Analysis:**

This project offers an exceptionally diverse range of conservation and recreation benefits, including opportunities for multi-use recreational enjoyment of the property's natural amenities and conservation of stream, riparian, and upland habitats. Throughout the project development process, FWP and BRLT will conduct outreach with local partners, media outlets, and other stakeholders to convey the significant conservation values of this project, with a primary focus on the following issues:

- a. **Conservation of Riparian and Aquatic Habitats.** Relatively wide areas of floodplain where large rivers are still able to migrate laterally are increasingly rare in Montana. The movement of a river within its floodplain is one of the most important ecological processes for maintaining the extraordinarily high biomass and biodiversity streams, wetlands, and riparian areas are capable of supporting. Acquiring this property will preserve the ability of the West Fork to move within its floodplain because the area will be permanently protected from development which often leads to rip-rapped banks, removal of riparian forest, and fragmentation of the river corridor. The riparian habitat present on the property is healthy and supports a wide range of game and nongame species. Acquiring this property will preserve habitat for many sensitive species in both the aquatic and terrestrial realms.
- b. **Conservation of Montane Forests and Meadows.** Once the West Fork flows out of the canyon into the broad Bitterroot Valley, much of the historic mix of grassy meadows and ponderosa pine forests have been converted for agriculture and development. FWP's acquisition of this property will protect 32 acres of ponderosa pine forests consisting of mostly large-diameter trees that provide habitat for many songbird and raptor species. The open understory of shrubs and grasses provide forage and cover for elk, deer, and moose, and also allows animal movement between the river bottom and USFS lands above West Fork Road.
- c. **Public Access for Multi-Use Recreation.** The proposed FAS project will provide 100 acres of public land for a wide variety of recreational uses and will enhance non-motorized access to large blocks of public land in the Bitterroot National Forest. The property is currently in private ownership and access is limited to the current 1.5-acre leased FAS. The creation of the proposed FAS will provide the only FWP-owned access along the West Fork, a blue-ribbon fishing destination at the gateway of the wild and scenic West Fork river canyon.

Once acquired, the WW White Memorial Fishing Access Site will be advertised on FWP's and BRLT's websites, social media pages, and newsletters. The project will also be advertised through various local media outlets. A sign at the FAS will denote contributors to the project including the MFWCT were this funding request granted.

17. **Existing Project Area Land Management:** The FWP Region 2 FAS program currently leases 1.5 acres from the Stomberg/White family to provide an undeveloped FAS at the southeast corner of the proposed acquisition. This FAS is primitive in nature and its existence is determined by a lease-renewal cycle based on continued cooperation with the landowner. The Stomberg/White family currently manages and maintains the property, and recently conducted logging operations to restore the historic open, large-diameter ponderosa pine forest type on the 20 acres on the west side of Highway 473. The landowner has refrained from conducting similar operations on the 80 acres of river-bottom pending potential acquisition of the property by FWP. There is some merchantable timber in the river-bottom, but logging operations will be unlikely to occur due to the high-value habitat and costs of operating in the area. If logging were to occur on the river-bottom portion of the property, the harvest would be light and focused on mitigating impacts from insect outbreaks and disease. The property is not conducive to grazing or mining.
18. **Use of MFWCT Funds:** Funding from the MFWCT would be applied directly to the purchase of the property and would not be used for infrastructure development or overhead costs. The \$150,000 requested for the purchase of this property would cover approximately 25% of the total acquisition price. If approved, MFWCT's contribution will be well-matched by additional investments from a handful of other funding entities that are also committed to habitat conservation and recreational access, as outlined in Table 1.

Project Monitoring: Once acquired, the property will be managed under the FAS program in FWP Region 2. The property will be managed in a similar manner to other FASs in Montana, with ongoing weed maintenance and infrastructure improvements and repairs as-needed. The property will be monitored annually to ensure that the conservation values and recreational amenities remain in good condition.

19. **Additional Comments:** The appraisal of the property from 2016 is available upon request, and if funding can be secured an environmental assessment will be conducted.

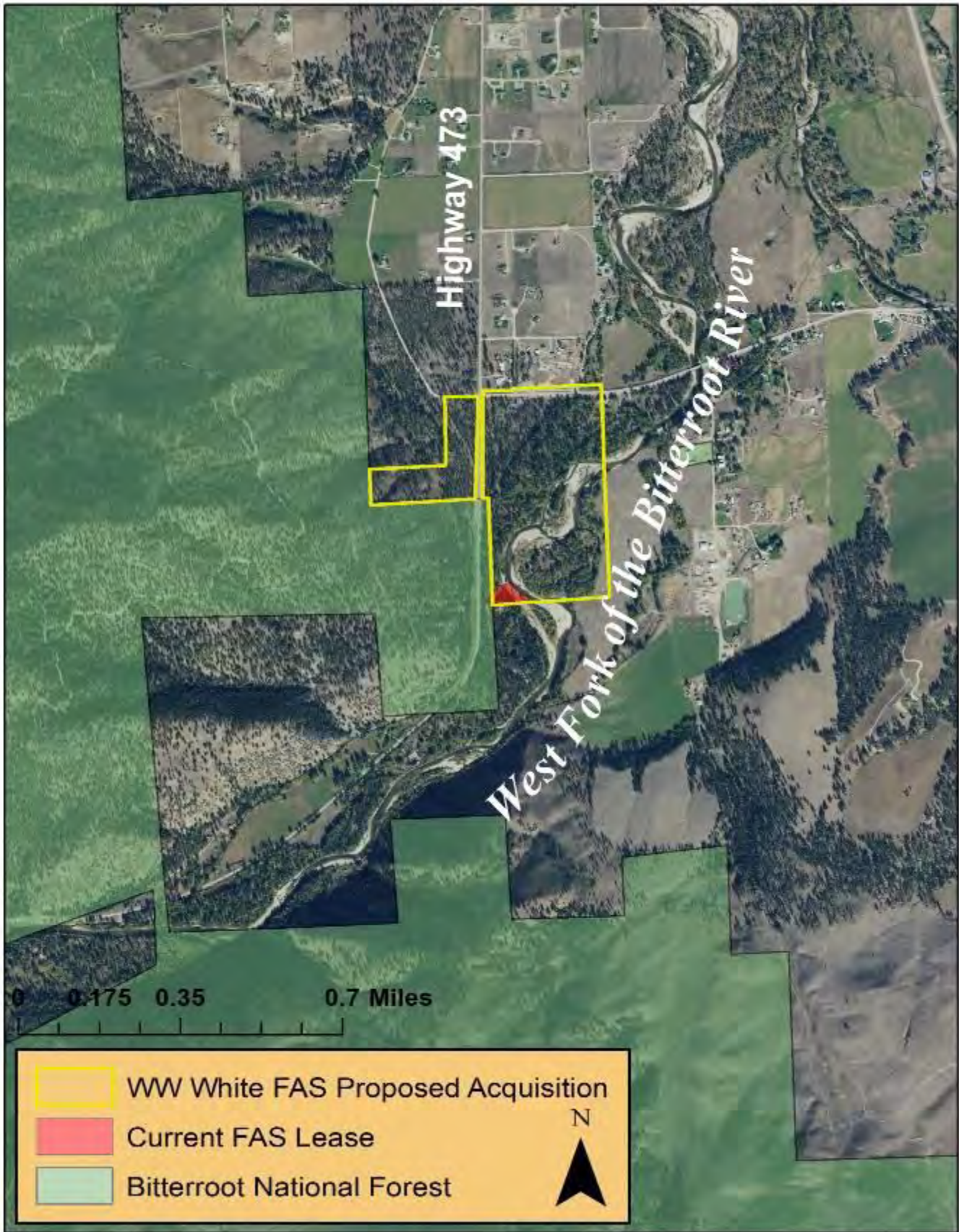
Appendix A - List of Sensitive Species Present or Potentially Present within the Proposed WW White Memorial FAS

Species	Status	Habitat	Status in Project Area
Bull Trout	Threatened	Coldwater streams	Verified in area
Westslope Cutthroat Trout	SOC	Coldwater Streams	Verified in area - abundant
Fisher	SOC	Mixed conifer forests	Verified in area
Bald Eagle	Delisted, SOC	Riparian forests	Verified in area. Nesting pairs along West Fork.
Clark's Nutcracker	SOC	Conifer forests	Verified in area
Evening Grosbeak	SOC	Mixed conifer forests	Verified in area
Flammulated Owl	SOC	Low-mid elevation conifer forests with large trees	Verified in area
Great Blue Heron	SOC	Riparian woodlands	Verified in area
Pileated Woodpecker	SOC	Conifer/riparian forests with large trees	Verified in area
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Brown Creeper	SOC	Mixed conifer forests	Likely present but not verified
Great Gray Owl	SOC	Conifer and riparian forests with large trees	Suitable habitat in area, not verified
Lewis's Woodpecker	SOC	Riparian forests	Likely present but not verified
Northern Goshawk	SOC	Mixed conifer forests	Suitable habitat in area, not verified
Northern Hawk Owl	SOC	Conifer forests	Suitable habitat in area, not verified
Pacific Wren	SOC	Conifer/riparian forests	Likely present but not verified
Peregrine Falcon	Delisted, SOC	Cliffs near riparian or wetland habitat	Nesting pairs along West Fork.
Varied Thrush	SOC	Riparian forests	Likely present but not verified
Veery	SOC	Riparian forests	Likely present but not verified
Western Skink	SOC	Open conifer forests/grasslands	Suitable habitat in area, not verified
Western Toad	SOC	Wetlands, lakes, floodplain ponds	Likely present but not verified
Hoary Bat	SOC	Riparian and forests	Suitable habitat in area, not verified
Little Brown Myotis	SOC	Generalist	Suitable habitat in area, not verified

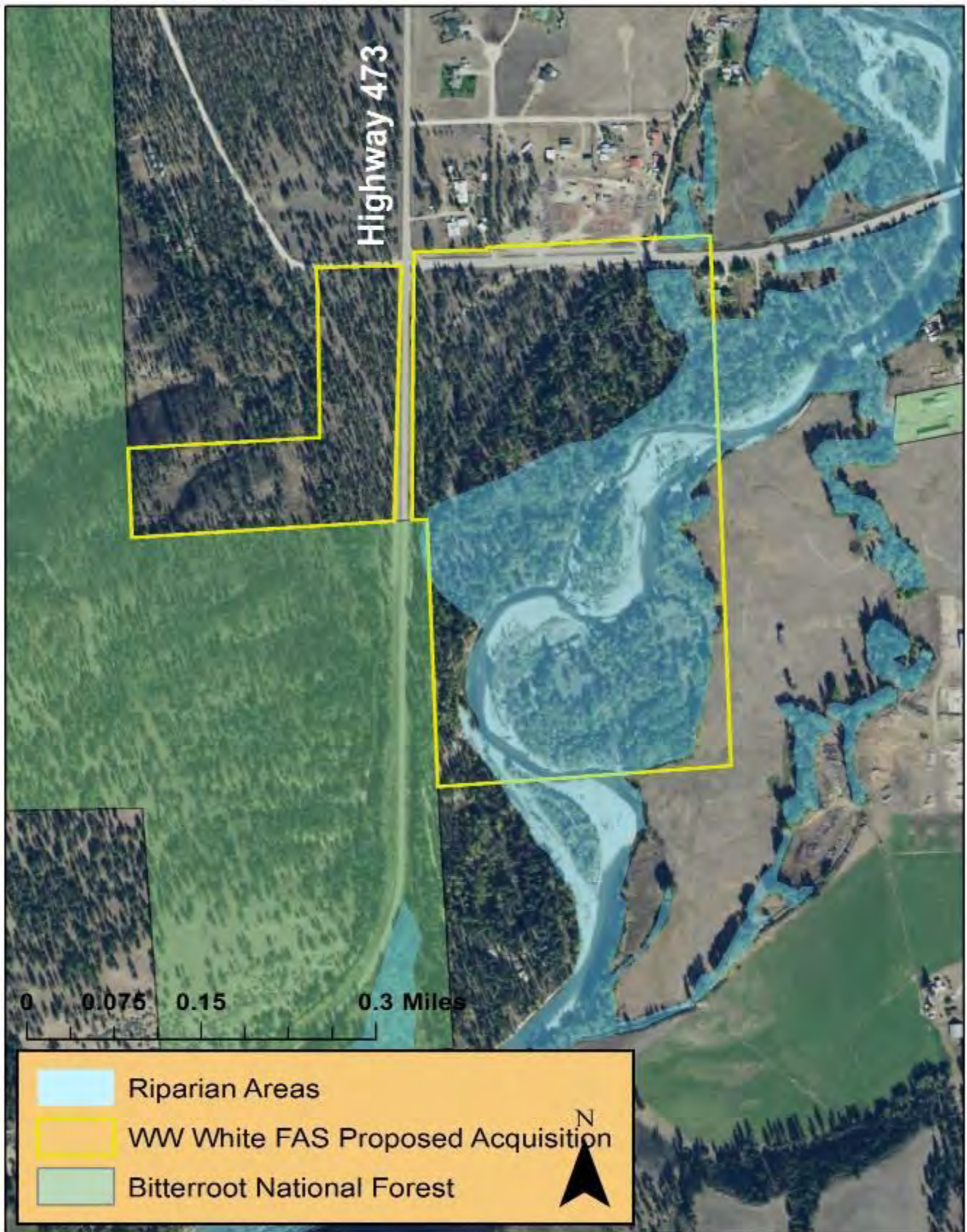
Appendix B - Project Area Maps



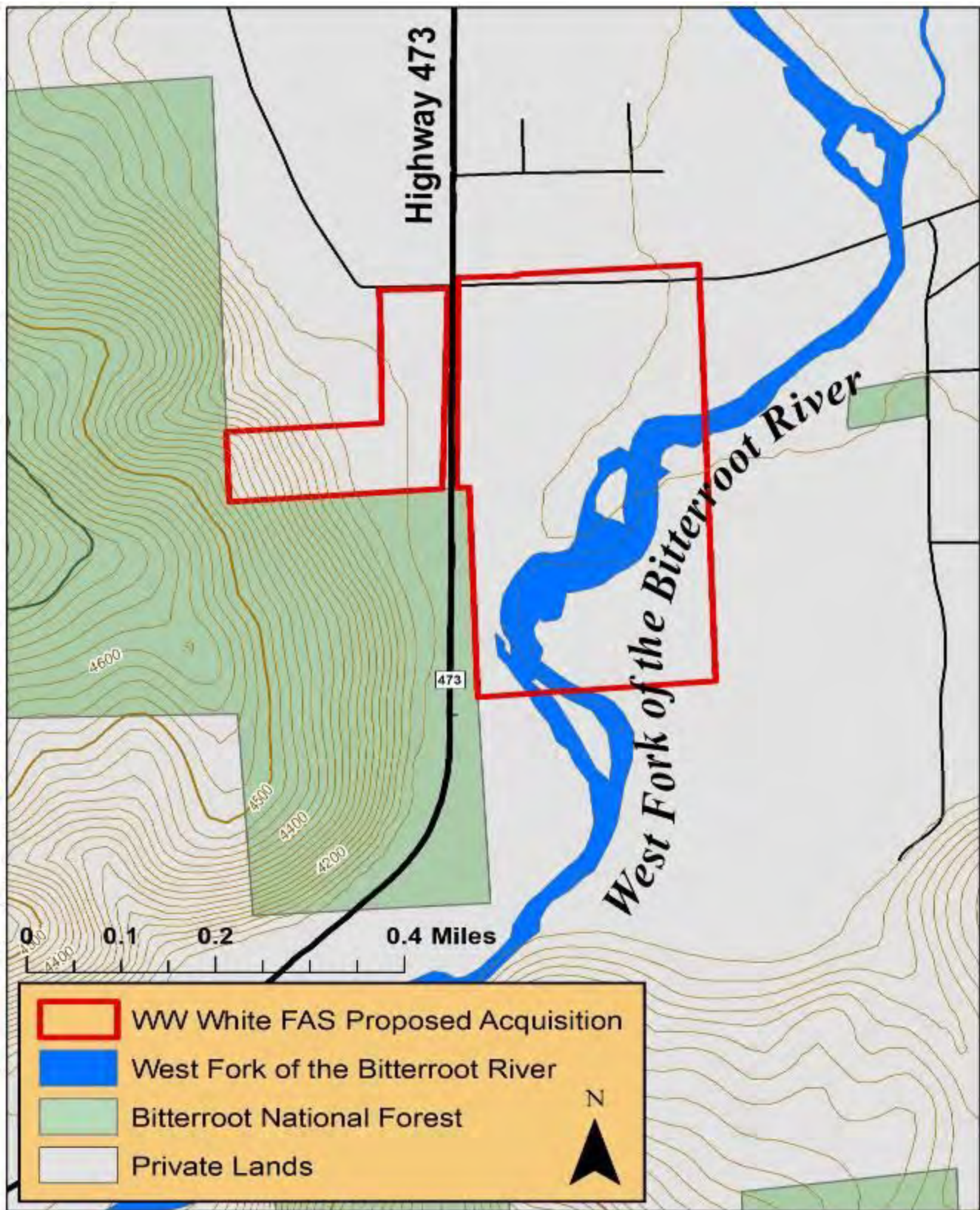
Map 1. Area map showing the proposed WW White Memorial Fishing Access Site on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River in West-Central Montana.



Map 2. Landscape map of the proposed WW White Memorial Fishing Access Site on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River in West-Central Montana. All lands not denoted as Bitterroot National Forest are under private ownership.



Map 3. Map of the proposed WW White Memorial Fishing Access Site on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River in West-Central Montana showing portions of the property designated as riparian habitat by the Montana Natural Heritage Program.



Map 4. Topographic map of the proposed WW White Memorial Fishing Access Site (FAS) on the West Fork of the Bitterroot River in West-Central Montana. National Forest lands are currently difficult to access along Highway 437 due to limited parking along the road and steep terrain. The proposed FAS will allow users to park in the flat area on the west side of the property and access recreational opportunities along trails leading into National Forest.

Appendix C - Project Area Photos



Photo 1. Backwater surrounded by cottonwood, willow, alder, and other deciduous shrubs. These types of floodplain habitats are critical for a variety of songbird and waterfowl species as well as breeding sites for amphibians. This backwater was being used by a beaver and a pair of pileated woodpeckers were foraging on fallen cottonwood trees nearby. Protecting this property from development or other land use changes will maintain the critical ecological connection between the river and the floodplain that allows backwaters like this to form, providing rich wildlife habitat while also dissipating flood waters from the river.



Photo 2. Portions of the property are dominated by an open ponderosa pine forest type with towering trees, ideal for picnicking, wildlife-watching, or a quiet walk along the river. An incredible variety of both aquatic and terrestrial habitats exist on the property, including mixed cottonwood and ponderosa pine forests, backwaters and floodplain pools, aspen stands, shrub thickets, open woodlands, and the multi-threaded river channels of the West Fork of the Bitterroot River. The mosaic of habitats makes the property a biodiversity hotspot and an excellent place for wildlife-watching.



Photo 3. The property is located at the mouth of the West Fork of the Bitterroot River canyon and is one of the first places where the river is able to move around in the floodplain after being confined to a single channel in the canyon. This creates ideal conditions for willow and cottonwood growth and forms complex aquatic habitat for fish and the anglers that pursue them. The main channel of the West Fork splits into multiple channels through the property, providing a range of options for anglers seeking Westslope cutthroat trout, rainbow trout, brown trout, and mountain whitefish. Bull trout, a federally threatened species, are also present in this portion of the river and benefit from the downed woody debris and complex aquatic habitat.



Photo 4. View of most of the proposed acquisition from the far western edge of the property. The property owner recently conducted logging operations on the upland portion of the property to reduce wildfire risk to her home and to restore a more open ponderosa pine habitat type. This upland area was full of elk and deer scat as well as game trails leading to the river bottom and up into the steep hills where the property transitions into U.S. Forest Service lands. The draw in this photo will provide access along trails from the flat bench near Highway 473. If the property were acquired by FWP, a dirt parking lot would be constructed on the bench to provide safer and easier access from Highway 473.

Appendix D - Letters of Support for the Proposed WW White Memorial Fishing Access Site



April 11, 2019

Dear Citizens Advisory Board,

It is our pleasure to enthusiastically support the funding application for the WW White Memorial Fishing Access Site to the Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust.

The concept of this 101 acre site that is proposed for public use for fishing, swimming, hiking and wildlife viewing coordinates with the mission of Bitterroot Audubon Society and of National Audubon: "to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and earth's biological diversity." We are a non-profit organization of over 250 members who are invested in the protection of critical bird habitat in the Bitterroot Valley and beyond.

The Bitterroot River corridor has some of the most productive bird habitat in our valley. The proposed Fishing Access Site would protect nearly 80 acres of river-bottom forests and riparian areas permanently. We are confident that our members and their families will be frequent visitors to the site to experience the range of biodiverse habitats. We are also confident that the many tourists known for coming to our Bitterroot River will find the fishing, wildlife viewing and birdwatching at this site to be more than memorable.

We look forward to seeing the variety of songbirds, waterfowl and raptors that this proposal would protect.

We urge you to help fund the acquisition of this wonderful property.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Becky Peters, M.S.

President

Bitterroot Audubon Society



April 10, 2019

Torrey Ritter
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
3201 Spurgin Rd.
Missoula, MT 59804

RE: WW White Memorial FAS, Hunting Access, and Habitat Acquisition

Dear Torrey,

This letter provides Bitter Root Land Trust's (BRLT) enthusiastic support for the WW White Memorial FAS acquisition project. BRLT has been discussing some iteration of this project with the Stomberg/White family for more than a decade. The project aligns nicely with two primary pillars of our mission: to protect the wildlife habitat and the water resources of the Bitterroot Valley. After years of shaping and negotiating the details of this project in fits and starts, we are extremely pleased that it is now coming to fruition— both for the landowners, who wish to see the land used and enjoyed by the public, and for the future of the land.

This project provides a robust and diverse menu of benefits and amenities to the public and wildlife alike.

Habitat—Encompassing approximately 100 acres, the project will serve to protect more than a half mile stretch of the West Fork and its associated 68-acre riparian area and river-bottom forest at the gateway to its upstream canyon. Further, the project includes 20 acres of upland ponderosa forest, which serves to connect the West Fork river bottom to the adjacent Forest Service land creating a critical migration corridor for elk and other wildlife, which heavily utilize the subject property. Without an effort to protect this important tract, the property would face imminent development given its prime location.

Public Fishing, Hunting, Hiking, and Camping Access—This project will ultimately deliver a diversity of recreational and access opportunities seldom provided by one acquisition project. The project will enhance, enlarge, and secure in perpetuity a currently leased and highly used fishing access site (FAS). Additionally, a campground is envisioned adjacent to the FAS, which will provide hikers, rafters, and other recreationists the opportunity to camp near the West Fork. The upland portion of the property will encompass a new access point and a developed parking area for hunting and hiking access to the adjacent Forest Service land. This land is currently only accessible by parking along the busy highway and hiking in. The West Fork is an extremely popular fishing and recreation destination, and this acquisition will help both secure access as well as balance and distribute use of the river by the public.

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LAND TRUST

BRLT will serve as a partner to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) for the project moving forward, primarily in a fundraising and project development support capacity. BRLT will utilize established partnerships with private funding sources to garner support for the project while assisting FWP in public funding processes and facilitating communication with the landowner. BRLT is proud to partner with FWP as a continuation of a longstanding and successful partnership.

This project benefits the public, the river, and the wildlife in a substantial way. Securing this special piece of the West Fork will be pivotal in ensuring those benefits are realized by future generations of Bitterroot sportspeople, citizens, and visitors.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gavin Ricklefs". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Gavin Ricklefs

Executive Director

Bitter Root Land Trust

Hamilton, MT

(406) 375-0956

www.bitterrootlandtrust.org