



IDAHO FISH AND GAME GOLDSHEET

May 2026 Commission Meeting

Agenda Item: *Helmick Conservation Easement Part II*

(Action)

Presented by: *Casey Pozzanghera*

Position/Title: *Lands/Mitigation Program Coordinator*

Agenda Item No.: *5E*
Supervisor Approval: *SR*

Background:

In July of 2024, the Fish and Game Commission, through the Department, purchased a conservation easement on 3,476 acres of land in Elmore County owned by Helmick Ranch LLC. The property is located on the south side of Highway 20 near Hill City, in the heart of an important big game migration area. The Department is now proposing to purchase an easement on an additional 38-acres that the Helmick Ranch LLC recently acquired, immediately adjacent to the existing easement.

Mule deer, elk, and pronghorn use the Highway 20 corridor to migrate between summer range in the Soldier Mountains to the north and winter range in the Bennett Hills to the south. Movement maps of mule deer from the Smokey-Bennett DAU highlight a few, very specific areas that deer use during their migrations and the Helmick Ranch sits squarely in the center of one of those areas. Department data suggest that as many as 12,000 mule deer migrate across Highway 20 each year and roughly 45% of those deer travel through the Helmick Ranch. Smokey-Bennett mule deer are the second most heavily hunted population in the state and provide both general hunting opportunities in GMU 43 as well as coveted trophy hunting opportunities in GMUs 44 and 45. Protecting migrating deer on private land along the Highway 20 corridor will help to ensure these deer continue to thrive and provide these valuable hunting opportunities on the surrounding public lands.

As with the larger 3,476-acre easement, this 38-acre easement would grant the Commission development rights to the property, ensuring that it will remain in its current undeveloped state in perpetuity, while continuing to allow the landowners to run their ranching operation. The 38-acre parcel is not only adjacent to the existing protected acres, it is also immediately adjacent to highway 20, making it even more vulnerable to development should the Commission and Department not act to protect it. Public access is not included with this easement.

This easement was previously presented to the Commission during Executive Session in November 2025. The appraised value of the easement is \$50,000. IDFG lands acquisition funds (commonly referred to as HB 530 funds) would be used for the purchase

Statutory Authority and/or Policy Issues:

The Idaho Fish and Game Commission has the authority to acquire land (Idaho Code 36-104(b)(7)). Land acquisition is in accordance with Commission land acquisition policy.



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Public Involvement Process:

Elmore County commissioners have been notified.

Justification:

The proposed action would protect valuable big game transitional habitat and improve landscape connectivity within the Smokey- Bennett DAU.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommend acquiring the 38-acre Helmick Ranch Conservation Easement in Elmore County.

Suggested Motion:

I move the Commission acquire the 38-acre Helmick Ranch Conservation Easement in Elmore County.

