DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

DISPOSAL OF IDFG ST. MARIES PARCELS (W-26-L) IN EXCHANGE FOR BLACK LAKE RANCH

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Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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CHAPTER 1: PURPOSE AND NEED

Introduction

The State of Idaho, Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) is proposing to dispose of four parcels comprised of 1,402.04 acres of mostly forested land in Benewah County, Idaho, in trade for 1,012.72 acres fronting the Coeur d'Alene River and Black Lake located in Kootenai County, Idaho. As a Federal action with the potential to affect the human environment, this approval by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) Program requires a National Environmental Policy Act; 42 U.S.C. 4321-4347 (NEPA) analysis of its potential impacts and this Environmental Assessment (EA) will serve that function. This EA primarily analyzes the effects of the disposal of the St. Maries parcels that were purchased with WSFR funds. The secondary benefits of acquiring the Black Lake Ranch (BLR) will not be analyzed in as great a detail as the acquisition of land is generally covered under a Categorical Exclusion under NEPA (FWS 516 DM 8.5 (A)(4)).

Purpose and Need

Project Purpose

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to dispose of four disconnected and timbered parcels of land that are no longer serving the purposes for which they were originally acquired, in exchange for the acquisition of a single large parcel which provides high value for wildlife and wildlife-related recreational activities. The proposed new acquisition has highly valuable wetlands, opportunities to restore and improve the value of those wetlands, supports game and Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), provides enhanced physical and ecological connectivity within the Coeur d'Alene River Wildlife Management Area (WMA), and supports higher levels and more diverse recreational opportunities than the disposal parcels can provide. In addition, acquisition of the proposed new property, BLR, would facilitate IDFG ability to remediate and restore the contaminated floodplain wetlands for migrating and breeding waterbirds, migratory birds, and waterfowl.

Need for Action

The four disconnected parcels IDFG has identified for disposal were purchased in the 1940s, with assistance from the USFWS funding via Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Program 15.611 under the authority of: Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937, 50 Stat. 917 as amended; 16 U.S.C. 669-669k (WR) funds for protection of wildlife habitat, primarily big game winter range. Currently, these parcels are bordered by National Forest lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), the U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) and private timber company lands (Figure 1A). Based on the fragmented nature of the ownership and management of the IDFG parcels, the properties currently contribute little to maintaining either big game winter range or public access in the greater landscape.

Acquisition of the 1,012.72-arce Black Lake parcel in the exchange would serve to provide public access and facilitate the ability of IDFG to remediate and restore floodplain wetland habitats for migrating and breeding waterbirds, migratory birds, and waterfowl, including migrating tundra swans (*Cygnus columbianus*).

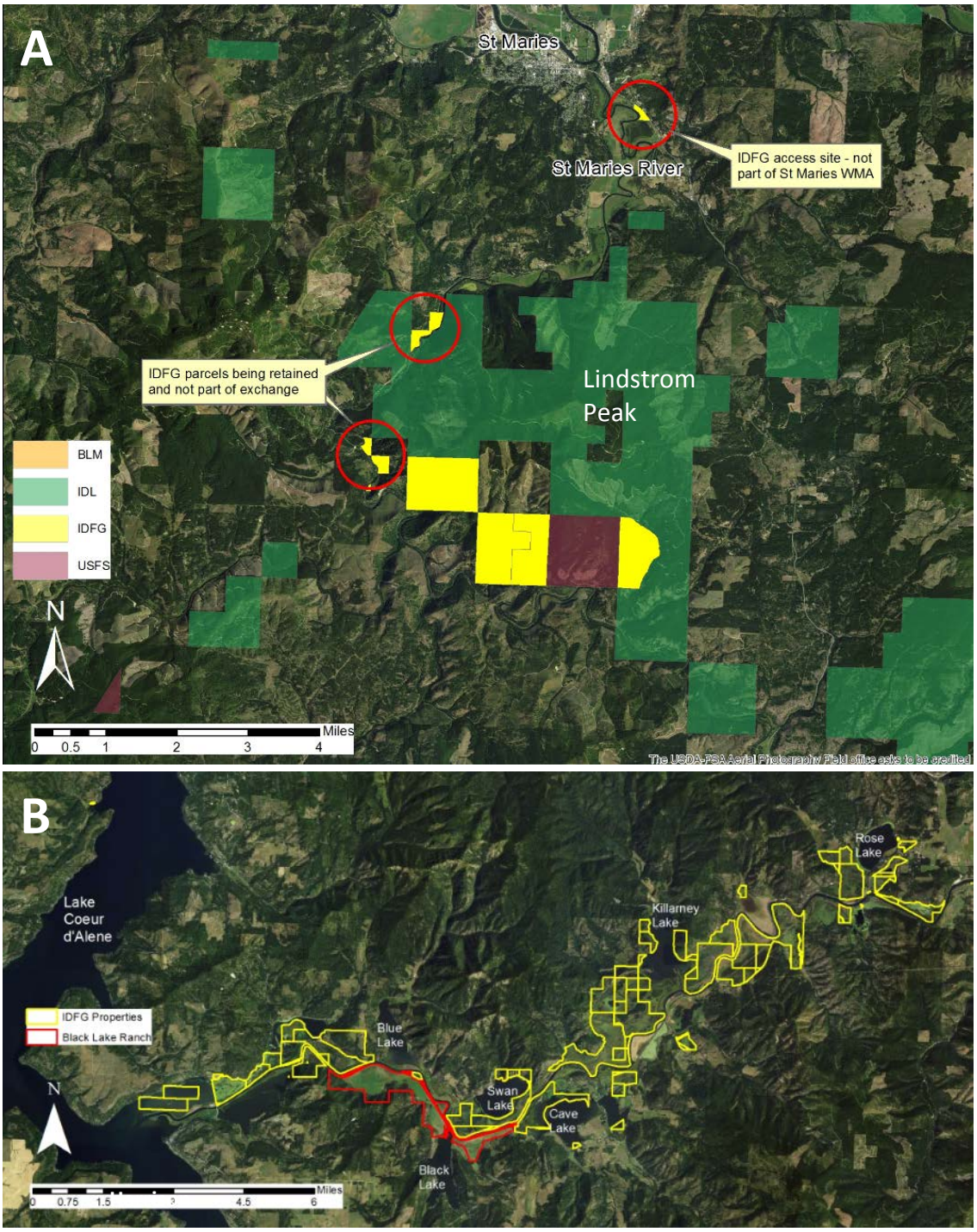

Figure 1. (A) State and federal landownership in the vicinity of the St. Maries WMA. Areas with no shading represent private ownership. (B) IDFG landownership (yellow outlines) in relation to the Black Lake Ranch (red outline) located along the Coeur d'Alene River (aerial photographs USDA-FSA 2014).

Proposed Action

The proposed Action would authorize the sale of 1,402.04 acres of the St. Maries WMA and acquisition of a 1,012.72-acre parcel fronting the Coeur d'Alene River and Black Lake.

This exchange must comply with federal NEPA compliance when the State proposes actions such as a sale or exchange of property purchased with WSFR funding. The proposed land exchange between the State of Idaho and the private landowners will require no additional Federal funds, per se, as the St. Maries parcels have a greater monetary value than the Black Lake parcel. Therefore, if the 1,012.72-acre Black Lake parcel is acquired through this exchange, the Notice of Federal Participation will shift to this parcel rather than the St. Maries parcels. And the Black Lake parcel would serve to provide public access and facilitate the ability of IDFG to remediate and restore floodplain wetland habitats for migrating and breeding waterbirds and waterfowl, including migrating tundra swans. Therefore the "Action" being analyzed is to determine the impacts of disposing of the St. Maries parcels and whether or not the land to be acquired by the State through the exchange would maintain or enhance wildlife values as funded by WSFR monies.

Action Area

The action area is the St. Maries area approximately six miles south of the town of St. Maries in Benewah County, Idaho (Figure 2). The terms 'Action area' and 'St. Maries parcels' are the same thing and are used interchangeably throughout the document.

Project Background

St. Maries WMA – Parcels Proposed for Disposal

Acquisition of lands to establish the St. Maries WMA started in 1941, and continued incrementally through 1947, resulting in the purchase of 6,500.86 fee-title acres (Table 1). These lands were acquired from private landowners using WR funds now managed under the USFWS WSFR Program. An acquisition of 15.26 acres using State funds occurred in 1963, as did two donations from private landowners; one in 1946 for 120 acres, and a second in 1978 for 65 acres (Table 1).

Starting in 1966, four land exchanges reduced the size of the St. Maries WMA to its current size of 1,546 acres (Table 2). On October 19, 1966, 554 acres of St. Maries WMA were traded to Potlatch in exchange for 290 acres at Winchester Lake in Lewis County. In 1985, 330 acres were traded to IDL for property in Custer County. In 1990, a complex land exchange resulted in a 3,680-acre transfer of IDFG lands to the IDL for 12,055 acres of IDL land to IDFG to create the Snow Peak WMA located in Shoshone County. In February 2004, 592 acres were exchanged to IDL for title to acquire 1,928 acres within and adjacent to the IDFG Boise River WMA in Ada County. Later, 64.71 acres of the IDL St. Maries lands involved in the 2004 trade were part of an exchange between USFS, University of Idaho, IDL, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and IDFG that netted 2,278 acres on Tex Creek WMA located in Bonneville County. In total, 5,156 acres have been traded out of the St. Maries WMA (Table 2). The remaining large tracts of land

under IDFG ownership (1,402 acres), with exception of the public access sites to the St. Maries River, have been on the Idaho Fish and Game Commission's disposal list since 1990, and IDFG has viewed these lands as surplus and for disposal since then, with the Commission reaffirming this in 2007.

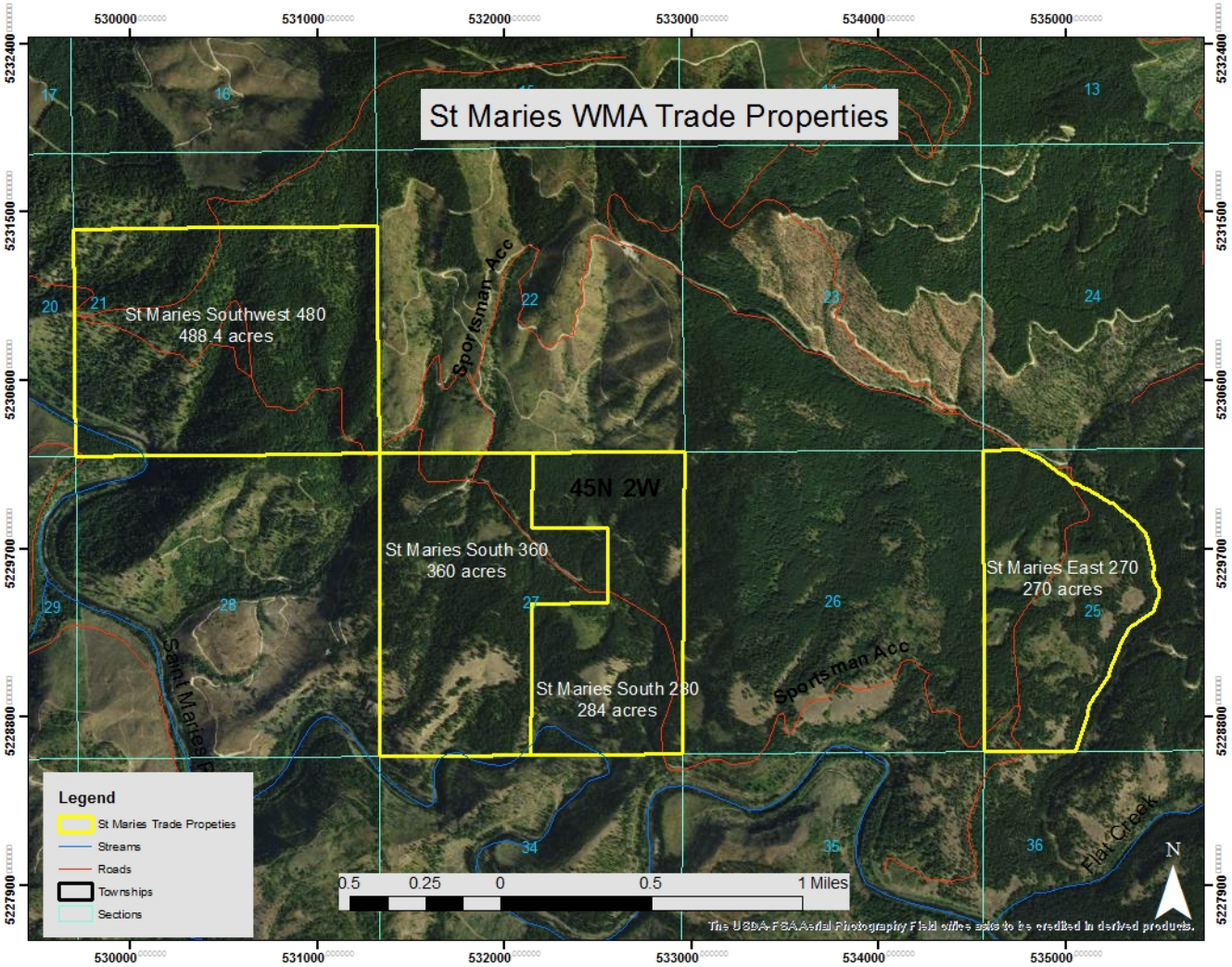

Figure 2. Four parcels proposed for exchange equaling a total of 1,402.04 acres (located in Township 45 North, Range 2 West, Sections 21, 25 and 27).

The parcels fronting the St. Maries River are not proposed for exchange or sale and will remain in IDFG ownership to continue to provide public access to the St. Maries River (Figure 1A). IDFG held cooperative management agreements with the BLM (since 1989) and USFS (since 1979) that incorporate management of 800 Federal acres (Figure 1) as part of IDFG St. Maries WMA management; however, the cooperative agreements have since expired and there are no plans to reenter into new cooperative management agreements.

Table 1. St. Maries WMA acquisition history (sources: USFWS Federal Land Purchase Records, IDFG Lands Database, historical notes and title records).

Year Acquired	Landowner	Federal Grant No.	Acres	Metes and Bounds Legal Description		
				T	R	Section
1941	W.E. Neece	W-26-L-1A	400.00	45N	2W	27/23
1941	O.W. Blake	W-26-L-1B	1,194.00	45N	2W	11
1941	C. Shay	W-26-L-1C	80.00	45N	2W	23
1941	J.M. Brebner	W-26-L-1D	213.26	45N	2W	9
1941	P.C. Fleming	W-26-L-1E	640.00	45N	2W	13
1941	C.A. Taskey/Sargent	W-26-L-2	600.00	45N	2W	25
1942	Ebbett and Herrington	W-26-L-11C	160.00	45N	2W	10
1943	E. A. Kirkpatrick	W-26-L-5	1,560.00	45N	2W	15/17/21
1947	C. Kelso	W-26-L-6A	187.05	45N	2W	9
1947	Benewah County	W-26-L-6B	1,066.55	45N	2W	2/14/25/27
1947	Benewah County	W-26-L-7	400.00	45N	2W	23
		subtotal	**6,500.86**			
1946	C. Oeser	Donation	120.00	45N	2W	9
1963	Frankie Bredvold	IDFG License Funds	15.26	46N	2W	25
1978	John Pring	Donation	65.00	45N	2W	20
		Total acres	**6,701.12**			

Table 2. St. Maries WMA disposal history (sources: USFWS Federal Land Purchase Records, IDFG Lands Database, historical notes and title records).

Year Disposed	Federal Grant No.	Acres	Metes and Bounds Legal Description			Comments
			T	R	Section	
1966	W-26-L-1BA	554	44N	1W	5	Traded to Potlatch 291
1985	W-26-L-7B	330	45N	2W	23	Traded to IDL
1990	W-26-L 11A	3,680	45N	2W	Involved 8 sections	Traded to IDL via RANECO for 12,055 acres on Snow Peak WMA
2004	W-26-L-12A	592	45N	2W	23 and 25	Traded to IDL to acquire 1,928 acres for the Boise River WMA; 64.71 acres sold by IDL to benefit Tex Creek WMA
		5,156	**Total Acres Traded**			

As a result of these trades/exchanges, a substantial administrative record exists for the disposed lands. An initial environmental assessment (EA) was prepared for the Snow Peak –St. Maries exchange[1] in 1981 (Appendix I). After public comment periods, an EA was released by USFWS

[1] Also known as the Buck Creek-Lindstrom Peak exchange. Burlington Northern Incorporated Lands owned property in Buck Creek. Burlington Northern then later transferred lands to the Plum Creek Timber Company.

for public review on March 30, 1982. Supplemental information to bring the 1982 EA up to date was supplied to the USFWS on March 1, 1990 (Appendix II). Included in the supplemental information is a summary of the comments received relating to the proposed Snow Peak-St. Maries WMA exchange. Also included in the administrative record for the Snow Peak – St. Maries exchange is a decision memorandum prepared by C. Richard Neely[2] (1983). Neely stated, "Although the public controversy appears to be substantial, it does not relate to the environmental affects over the exchange and will not require the preparation of an EIS." Since equal or more wildlife enhancement than that at St. Maries WMA was expected to occur with the exchange, the Snow Peak-St. Maries exchange was approved and preceded. Very few comments are in the administrative record for the 2004 exchange.

The proposed parcel for acquisition, the Black Lake Ranch parcel, is located in the Coeur d'Alene River area in Kootenai County, Idaho, approximately 18 miles east from the town of Harrison (Figure 1B) and 21.7 miles northwest from the town of St. Maries.

Black Lake Ranch – Parcel Proposed for Acquisition

IDFG and the State's interest in the Black Lake Ranch (BLR) property is based on several key wildlife, natural resource, and recreational access enhancing opportunities it can provide. These include opportunities to manage its wetland habitats as part of the Coeur d'Alene River WMA, remediate toxic mine waste contaminated habitat, restoration of previously drained agriculture land back to high functioning wetland, improvement of longstanding water quality concerns, providing recreational opportunities that are more diverse and accessible to the public than the St. Maries parcels, and enhancement of both ecological connectivity and the continuity of public ownership and management along the lower Coeur d'Alene River (Figure 3).

For more than 100 years, the Coeur d'Alene Basin was one of the most productive silver, lead, and zinc mining areas in the United States, producing 7.3 million metric tons of lead and 2.9 million metric tons of zinc between 1883 and 1997 (Mitchell and Bennett 1983; Long 1998). The operations of these mines generated wastes containing hazardous metals including lead, zinc, cadmium, and arsenic. And a significant portion of these wastes were discharged into the Coeur d'Alene River and its tributaries. Tailings and contaminated sediments continue to shift and move with seasonal flooding events resulting in deposition in the Coeur d'Alene River channel, levees, and floodplain, as well as in lakes and wetlands next to the river (Campbell *et al.* 1999; Box *et al*. 1996; Fousek 1996; Rabbi 1994), and in Coeur d'Alene Lake (Woods and Beckwith 1997; Horowitz *et al*. 1993, 1995a, 1995b). Under The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA) State, Tribal, and the Federal governments took legal action against the responsible parties for the cleanup and restoration of sites affected by mining waste and are designated the "Natural Resource Trustees"— who represent the public interest in protecting and conserving natural resources. The Trustees for the Coeur d'Alene Basin are the U.S. Departments of Interior (represented by the USFWS and BLM) and Agriculture (represented by the USFS), the State of Idaho (represented by IDFG and IDEQ), and the Coeur d'Alene Tribe. Through a series of lawsuits, the Trustees obtained funds for restoration of natural resources injured by past mining practices. In cooperation with mine waste clean-up efforts of the EPA, the Natural Resources Trustees are actively contemplating

[2] Senior Attorney with the Office of the Solicitor, U.S. Department of the Interior, Pacific Region.

wetlands restoration in the lower Coeur d'Alene basin where the BLR property resides. Thus, the BLR is a key property within the Trustees clean-up and restoration planning area for natural resources within the lower Coeur d'Alene Basin. Acquisition of the property would facilitate short- and long-term remediation and restoration efforts of the ranch's contaminated lowlands (potential wetlands), provide public recreational access to a complex of wetland wildlife habitats, and complete the continuity of public ownership and management along the lower Coeur d'Alene River (Figure 3).

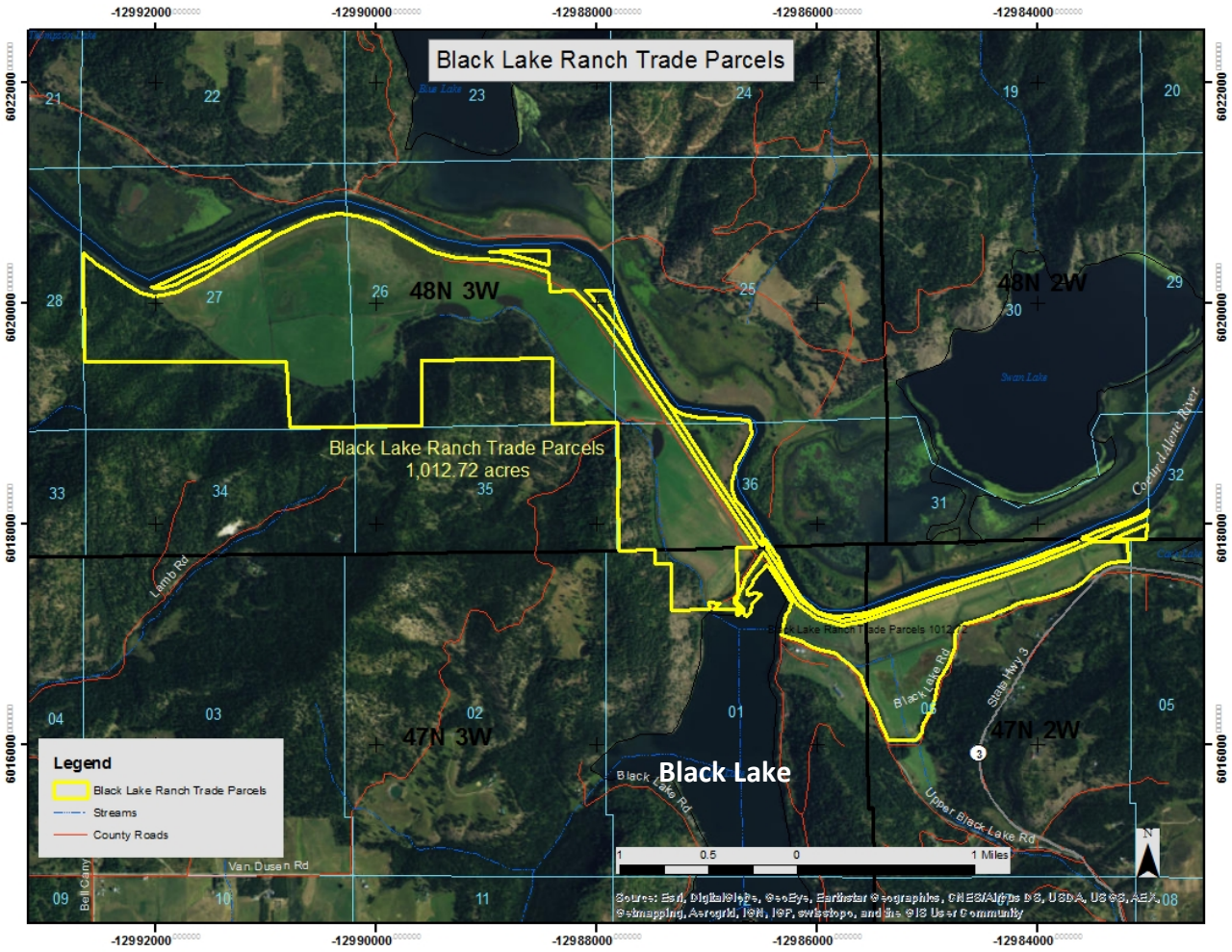

Figure 3. The 1,012.72-acre Black Lake Ranch parcel fronting the Coeur d'Alene River and a portion of Black Lake is composed of a mix of forested and floodplain habitats.

In 1972, 1981, and 1982, several animal poisonings were reported on the BLR property due to toxic blue-green algae blooms (Kann and Falter 1985). This triggered studies of Black Lake by the University of Idaho (UOI) (Kann and Falter 1985, Kann and Falter 1987) and IDEQ, (IDHW 1985). These studies and other monitoring data collected by IDEQ and the Coeur d'Alene Tribe over the past 20 years have demonstrated that the lake is not supporting cold water aquatic life as a result of excessive nutrient loading (IDEQ *et al*. 2011). Black Lake was placed on Idaho's 303(d) list of impaired lakes in 1998. Since the early blue-green algae blooms, IDEQ has a long history of complaints about Black Lake, primarily because of algae blooms and the

dewatering/pumping of 675 acres of historical wetlands on the north end of the lake for agricultural grazing purposes on the BLR (Figure 4). The draining and subsequent pumping water out of the BLR AG fields is identified as a point source of contributing pollution to Black Lake (IDEQ *et al*. 2011).

Figure 4. Water being pumped into Black Lake from the Black Lake Ranch property (photograph: January 12, 2012).

The BLR is a key property within the clean-up and restoration planning area for the natural resources within the lower Coeur d'Alene Basin due to its size and location. Acquisition of the property by IDFG would facilitate short- and long-term remediation and restoration efforts of the ranch's contaminated lowlands, with potential conversion of agricultural areas back to historic wetlands, wetland habitat improvements, and improvements to water quality issues of Black Lake.

The BLR is adjacent to the Coeur d'Alene River WMA on both the west and east ends. Acquisition of the property would allow for the improved connectivity of WMA lands and wetland habitats across the lower Coeur d'Alene Basin. The current wildlife species diversity, habitat values, and potential for improvement are felt to be extremely high by IDFG and the Natural Resources Trustees. Furthermore, a popular paved bike and walking trail, "Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes" runs through the property along the Coeur d'Alene River, providing exceptional opportunities for the public to view restoration activities and learn more about wildlife, wildlife habitats, and the enhancement activities associated with perpetuating wildlife and their habitats.

CHAPTER 2: ALTERNATIVES

Introduction

This chapter discusses the No-Action Alternative, the Proposed Action Alternative, and other Alternatives considered. Comparison of effects and commitments of the action alternatives is summarized in Table 5.

The No-Action Alternative

Under the No-Action Alternative, IDFG would retain the four parcels comprising of 1,402 acres near the Lindstrom Peak area and would not acquire the 1,012.72-acre parcel fronting the Coeur d'Alene River. The alternative of not disposing of the 1,402 acres of the St. Maries WMA in a trade for 1,012.72 acres of the BLR would result in agricultural activities continuing on the ranch, the water quality and total daily maximum daily load (TMDL) issues for Black Lake continuing and the continual degradation and loss of functional wetland habitat. Since the BLR landowners are actively seeking a buyer for the ranch, the landowner would most likely sell the 1,072-acre parcel to another buyer, and IDFG would forfeit the opportunity to include the ranch parcel in the larger Coeur d'Alene WMA (Figure 1B) with all the benefits that acquisition would convey to the public and wildlife resources including proceeding with restoration as directed and funded by the Natural Resources Trustees.

Under this alternative, IDFG would retain the four St. Maries WMA parcels, and the use of those parcels would remain the same. IDFG would still be responsible for managing the parcels. Some stands on the WMA have not been disturbed since IDFG began ownership in 1941, and as a consequence, disease and decay is impacting timber value. In addition, increased stand densities may lead to increased threat of wildfire. Management of the St. Maries parcels would remain custodial; however, IDFG would initiate some forest management action on the parcels. The parcels are still on the Idaho Fish and Game Commission's land disposal list and so it would be possible that another trade might be proposed in the future.

Purpose and Need Compliance

The No-Action Alternative does not meet the purpose and need of the proposed project because the Black Lake Ranch parcel would not be acquired and the habitat restoration, physical and ecological connectivity, water quality improvement, or expanded recreational opportunities would not be realized.

Proposed Action Alternative

The Proposed Action Alternative would involve the disposal of four parcels comprising 1,402.04 acres of mostly forested habitat on the St. Maries WMA and acquisition of 1,012.72 acres fronting the Coeur d'Alene River and Black Lake. The Proposed Action Alternative would include:

- Trading the 1,402.04 acres of the St. Maries WMA and transferring Federal interest as consideration for the 1,012.72-acre parcel fronting the Coeur d'Alene River and Black Lake;
- Managing the BLR parcel for forested and wetland wildlife habitats and for public recreation;
- Facilitating mining contaminants clean-up and restoration of the wetland habitats on the BLR property and thereby contributing to the overall effort to reduce lead toxicity and improve wetland function in the Coeur d'Alene basin;
- Balancing the exchange to ensure just compensation for each property.

The Proposed Action Alternative would result in the St. Maries parcels being transferred from public to private ownership, so the public may lose recreational access and would not be able to influence the management of these forested habitats. This could result in a loss of big game hunting opportunities; however, many working private forest lands adjacent to and surrounding these parcels remain open to public recreation primarily because controlling public access is expensive and difficult in the fragmented ownership of the Lindstrom Peak area. Public access and use of such lands is normal and accustomed, it is culturally accepted that such lands are open to public use in this area. Opportunities for new and future landowners to participate in programs that promote public and hunting access are offered by IDFG. Also, it is expected that the new or future owners would harvest the timber on the St. Maries parcels and wildlife habitats would be modified and shift from mature forest communities toward communities associated with early seral vegetation cover. If some snags were retained during timber harvest activities, then impacts to cavity nesters would be partially mitigated. Some of the indirect effects that would result from the land being actively managed for timber production include a change in visual quality, some soil erosion, and increases in roadways, noise, and disturbance. It is expected that the forested habitats would change from mostly mature conifer to mostly early seral stages, and remain in production status over the long-term. Early seral forest communities favor white-tailed deer, elk, grouse, and some migratory birds; migratory birds preferring older and denser stands would be negatively affected.

The Proposed Action Alternative would result in IDFG acquiring the BLR and allowing IDFG to protect 5 miles of river frontage. It would facilitate resolution of the TMDL and water quality issues at Black Lake, remediation of contaminated soils, and restoration of the 675 acres of agricultural lands back to functional wetlands. Additionally, it would provide opportunities to restore plants of cultural significance to the Coeur d'Alene Tribe including opportunities to gather these plants in the future.

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, acquisition of the BLR would facilitate IDFG and the Natural Resource Trustees the ability to remediate the contaminated wetland areas on the BLR, providing wetland areas with reduced metals concentrations which would lead to reducing overall exposure to the human and natural environment. The majority of palustrine and lacustrine habitat in the lower Coeur d'Alene River Basin has been negatively affected by mining-related metals pollution (USEPA 2002). Impacts to the basin resources from the release of mining-related metals are well documented (Stratus Consulting 2000). Resources that are most affected include surface and ground water, soils and sediments, riparian resources, fish, tundra swans, and benthic macroinvertebrates, and phytoplankton (U.S. District Court 2003).

The BLR is ranked highly as a target area for restoration and/or protection for the benefit of migrating tundra swans (USFWS 2009), other migrating and resident waterfowl, waterbirds and wildlife; therefore, acquisition of the BLR would facilitate IDFG and their partners ability to remediate and restore the wetlands habitats on the property and contribute to the overall effort to reduce lead toxicity and increase wetland habitat quality in the basin.

The BLR property is located between blocks of IDFG ownership and its acquisition would secure connectivity of ownership, public access, and management along the Coeur d'Alene River (Figure 1B). The BLR is also relatively large in size with over 675 acres of floodplain converted agricultural lands and about 292 acres of forested habitats. The diversity of wildlife habitats would also allow a diversity of recreational activities by the public, more so and to greater numbers than can be offered by the four St. Maries parcels.

Purpose and Need Compliance

The Proposed Action Alternative would meet the Purpose and Need for the project because it would facilitate acquisition of the BLR parcel as part of the overall wildlife management of the Coeur d'Alene River WMA. Acquisition of the BLR would allow IDFG and their partners to remediate the contaminated soils, address a long-standing TDML and water quality issue for Black Lake, and thereby improving fish and wildlife resources on rare wetland habitats. The Proposed Action Alternative would also result in the disposal of four forested parcels that would be changed to mostly early seral communities that favor white-tailed deer, elk, upland birds, and some migratory birds while still providing a high probability these parcels would remain open to public access.

Other Alternatives Considered and Dismissed

1) Negotiate a conservation easement on the St. Maries parcels prior to the trade – This alternative was considered but dismissed when the BLR landowners refused to accept a property encumbered with an easement.

2) Trade only one or two parcels – This alternative was considered but dismissed when the BLR landowners insisted that they wanted all four parcels rather than a single parcel.

3) IDFG harvests timber from the St. Maries parcels for benefit of wildlife. Proceeds of the timber sales are used to purchase BLR. This alternative was considered but IDFG desires divestiture of the St. Maries properties for their full values rather than retain them. Also, proceeds from the timber sales minus the land values would provide less funding to IDFG to complete other related acquisitions.

CHAPTER 3: AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the existing conditions of the human and natural environment within the action area and the area to be acquired. The action area for this analysis

is the four St. Maries parcels subject to disposal (Figure 2). The area proposed for acquisition is the Black Lake Ranch (Figure 3).

Affected Environment

St. Maries Parcels – Proposed for Disposal

The St. Maries parcels comprise four separately identified tracts that are all different in size (Figure 2), but similar in that they are forested habitats, and interconnected by a network of gravel and natural surface roadways. The topography varies on all parcels from 3,170 feet in elevation on the north slopes up the south side of Lindstrom Peak, down to 2,373 feet in elevation where it is crossed by the St. Maries River. The parcels include level hill tops and meadows as well as steep canyons and creek banks, especially those areas located on the south side of the St. Maries River.

Some small marshy, wetland areas are found along the creeks and drainages on the parcels. Over 80% of the parcel habitats are described as forested, with about 44% dry mesic mixed conifer forest and 36% mesic mixed conifer forest. The remainder is lower mountain foothill/deciduous scrubland, or temperate grassland, meadow and shrub land. About 10-12% is open meadows or low brushy areas on hilltops, ridges and terraces. Photographs of the St. Maries WMA parcels are included in Appendix III.

The predominant tree species on the St. Maries WMA are Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), western larch (*Larix occidentalis*), grand fir (*Abies grandis*), and ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*). Western white pine (*Pinus monticola*), lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*), western red-cedar (*Thuja plicata*), and western hemlock (*Tsuga heterophylla*) occur in lesser quantities. North and east facing slopes are primarily forested with dense stands of the Douglas-fir/mallow ninebark (*Physocarpus malvaceus*) and grand fir/ocean spray (*Holodiscus discolor*) habitat types. The south and west slopes are primarily forested with open stands of ponderosa pine/mallow ninebark and ponderosa pine/bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho fescue (*Pseudoroegneria spicata* and *Festuca idahoensis*). Western red-cedar, western hemlock, birch species (*Betula* spp.), alder species (*Alnus* spp.), and sedges (*Carex* spp.) are found adjacent to small perennial and intermittent stream beds and associated riparian meadows (IDFG 2014a).

Small areas of riverine and palustrine wetland occur within the WMA in the St. Maries River valley. Stands of riverine black cottonwood (*Populus balsamifera* ssp. *trichocarpa*) and occasionally quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) occur, with shrubby understories of black hawthorn (*Crataegus douglasii*), willow (*Salix* spp.), red-osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*), and common snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*). Palustrine wet meadows are dominated by reed canarygrass (*Phalaris arundinacea*), while depressional wetlands support emergent marsh communities (e.g., giant burred, *Sparganium eurycarpum*) (IDFG 2014a).

A variety of shrubs are found on the WMA, primarily on south and east slopes including ocean spray, mallow ninebark, common snowberry, shiny-leaf ceanothus (*Ceanothus velutinus*), redstem ceanothus (*Ceanothus sanguineus*), elderberry (*Sambucus* spp.), Oregon boxwood (*Paxistima myrsinites*), Rocky Mountain maple (*Acer glabrum*), and Scouler's willow (*Salix*

scouleriana). Canyon grasslands dominated by bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho fescue communities are common on south and west slopes and bluffs above the St. Maries River. Soils are shallow and will not support shrubs and trees to any extent (IDFG 2014a).

The parcels have not been thoroughly surveyed for noxious weeds or rare plants; however, the parcels are used for recreation and management has been mainly custodial, so it would be expected to have noxious weeds near and around boundaries to other timber production lands, roadways, and lower drainages where the public is known to travel. One rare plant species, Howell's Gumweed (*Grindelia howellii*), was been found on the WMA (IDFG 2014a).

An important management goal of the St. Maries WMA is to provide the public with opportunities for big game and upland bird hunting, fishing, and wildlife viewing. In 2014, as part of a statewide effort to update wildlife management area plans, IDFG published a new management plan that provides broad guidance for the long-term management (2014-2023) of the WMA. Current management direction for the St. Maries WMA is to:

- Provide high quality, secure habitat for resident elk and white-tailed deer;
- Provide high quality mixed conifer forest habitat to benefit a wide range of wildlife species;
- Provide functioning riparian forest and scrub-shrub habitat in good to excellent ecological condition to benefit a variety of fish and wildlife species;
- Provide for public access and recreational use compatible with wildlife and habitat management objectives; provide opportunities for wildlife viewing by the recreating public; and,
- Provide better customer service to the recreating public (IDFG 2014a).

Past management activities on portions of the parcels were directed towards opening portions of the forest canopy to create additional winter range for big game (IDFG 2014a). Timber sales were used to create small canopy openings that were subsequently broadcast burned to promote the regeneration of desirable browse plants. From 1967 – 1978, timber harvest treatments created seven small clear cuts totaling 105 acres. Shrub response to logging generally had excellent results, providing the small canopy openings which were then protected from all ungulate browsing by tall electric fences until plants became well established. In spite of past emphasis on creating forage areas, the IDFG found little evidence that the number of deer and elk wintering on the WMA had increased. Winter deer and elk use of logged areas did go up as evidenced by an increase for several years in the number of fecal pellet groups counted each spring following each harvest unit treatment. However, conventional aerial helicopter surveys in years following timber harvest failed to detect any increase in total numbers (IDFG 2014a).

The St. Maries WMA is home to a variety of migratory and resident mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish; however, recent wildlife occurrence records are scant for the four St. Maries WMA parcels. A list of the wildlife possibly present on the WMA can be found in

Appendix IV. There have been no systematic surveys of other mammals and birds on the WMA. Big game species commonly occur on the WMA and include: white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*); mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*); elk (*Cervus elaphus*); moose (*Alces alces*); black bear (*Ursus americanus*); gray wolf (*Canis lupus*); and, mountain lion (*Puma concolor*). White-tailed deer are abundant and are the most sought-after game species. Upland game species include ruffed grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*), dusky grouse (*Dendragapus obscurus*), and wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*). Ruffed grouse are the most numerous and are often hunted by deer and elk hunters during big game season (IDFG 2014a).

The St. Maries River flows along the southern and western border of the WMA. Most anglers are local residents of Benewah County and the number of anglers and catch rates are low (IDFG 2014a). Low flows and high temperatures during the summer months only allow seasonal use of this section of river by trout. Game fish found seasonally in this portion of the St. Maries River include: native westslope cutthroat trout (*Oncorhynchus clarkii lewisi*); mountain whitefish (*Prosopium williamsoni*); introduced rainbow trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*); brook trout (*Salvelinus fontinlis*); and, kokanee salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*). Introduced smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*) likely utilize the warmer portions of the river as they expand their range from Coeur d'Alene Lake. Common nongame fish include northern pike-minnow (*Ptychocheilus oregonensis*), largescale sucker (*Catostomus macrocheilus*), and longnose dace (*Rhinichthys cataractae*).

Black Lake Ranch – Parcel Proposed for Acquisition

The 1,012.72-acre BLR property includes approximately 675 acres of floodplain on the south side of the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes to the east and west of Black Lake, 45 acres of riparian habitats composed of riverine shrub and black cottonwood and about 292 acres of winter range shrub and forested uplands (Figure 3). Over 5 miles of the property fronts the Coeur d'Alene River and the property also front about 3,800 feet of Black Lake shoreline. Current uses of the floodplain portion include haying and cattle and horse ranching. This property has been extensively fenced, ditched and diked and continues to be pumped (Figure 4) in an effort to control surface water. Even so, several ponds exist on the property, and portions of several of the pastures become saturated during parts of the year. Prior to converting the floodplain habitats to agricultural production, the eastern and western portions of the property were seasonal wetlands used heavily by waterfowl. Photographs of the property are included in Appendix V.

The pumping of water off of the BLR property and into Black Lake (Figure 4) has been a source of water quality concerns for over two decades. Studies from analyzing lake sedimentary pigments suggest that the nutrient levels in the lake are now about 300% higher than it was in the past and that much of this productivity is a result of external loading of phosphorus (Bos and Stockner 2005; Kann and Falter 1987). The primary source of nutrient loading to Black Lake is from the dewatering/pumping of the agricultural lands on the north end of the lake from the BLR for grazing purposes; yet, these pumping activities pose no violation of the Clean Water Act due to an August 2008 EPA Water Transfer Rule. Still, Black Lake was placed on Idaho's 303(d) list of impaired lakes in 1998, and remains on the list today. The total phosphorus (TP) water quality target recommended for the Black Lake TMDL is 20 μg/L; however, the water quality data collected from 1991 to 2001, indicate that TP concentrations in Black Lake are often over

this level and can be as high as 530 µ/L, resulting in an estimated geometric mean of 39 µg/L (IDEQ *et. al* 2011).

Certainly this excessive nutrient loading has an impact on the fishery resources in Black Lake. At present, the various fish species identified in Black Lake include brown bullhead (*Ameiurus nebulosus*), channel catfish (*Ictalarus punctatus*), black bullhead (*Ameiurus melas*), pumpkinseed (*Lepomis gibbosus*), largemouth bass, yellow perch (*Perca flavescens*), black crappie (*Pomoxis nigomaculatus*), and bluegill (*lepomis macrochirus*) (IDFG 2006). Improving the water quality in Black Lake by reducing the TP being pumped from the BLR would also allow IDFG to consider management options to improve the fishery resources.

Both the east and west portions of the BLR property receive runoff from drainages located to the south, providing water to the area that is free from mining contamination. In April 2010, the USFWS collected over 200 soil samples from the 675-acre floodplain area on the ranch. Results indicated that while the property has some small "hot spots" for lead, lead levels are below levels of concern for waterfowl (USFWS, B. Spears, pers. comm.). This finding makes the BLR very desirable for remediation efforts. The preliminary indications from samples collected in the eastern portion (Figure 5) indicate that the area has been relatively protected from mining-related metals contamination (e.g., lead ranging 124-1,020 mg/kg, vs. >4,000 mg/kg north of the bike trail). The dike, on which the Trail of the Couer d'Alenes is built, the northern border of the western portion of the property has previously failed, which allowed the river direct access to the property. This likely resulted in elevated metals contamination in this area (Figure 5).

The BLR is also highly accessible, being directly accessible from roads adjacent to Highway 3 and from two-track roads spanning the length of the ranch making it less costly to remediate/restore than more remote areas, as well as via the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes and the Coeur d'Alene River.

Given the size of the property, its historic wetland characteristics, available water sources, relatively low metals concentrations in portions of the property, and location (western portion of the lower Basin; adjacent to highly contaminated wetland areas heavily used by waterfowl), the BLR property is ranked highly as a target area for restoration and/or protection for the benefit of tundra swans, other waterfowl, and waterbirds (DU and USFWS 2006). The BLR property currently attracts a diversity of waterfowl to its fields during flooding events in the spring.

Both the agricultural fields and the forested lands on the BLR are currently frequented by elk, white-tail deer, black bear, grouse, introduced pheasant and turkey, waterfowl, and a variety of small mammals. Vegetation cover in the ranch's forested habitats is mainly dominated by a mix of Douglas fir, ponderosa pine, lodgepole pine, and western larch, with an understory of myrtle pachystima, oneleaf foamflower (*Tiarella trifoliata var. unifoliata*), longtube twinflower (*Linnaea borealis var. longiflora*) , darkwoods violet (*Viola orbiculata*), and wild ginger (*Asarum sp.*).

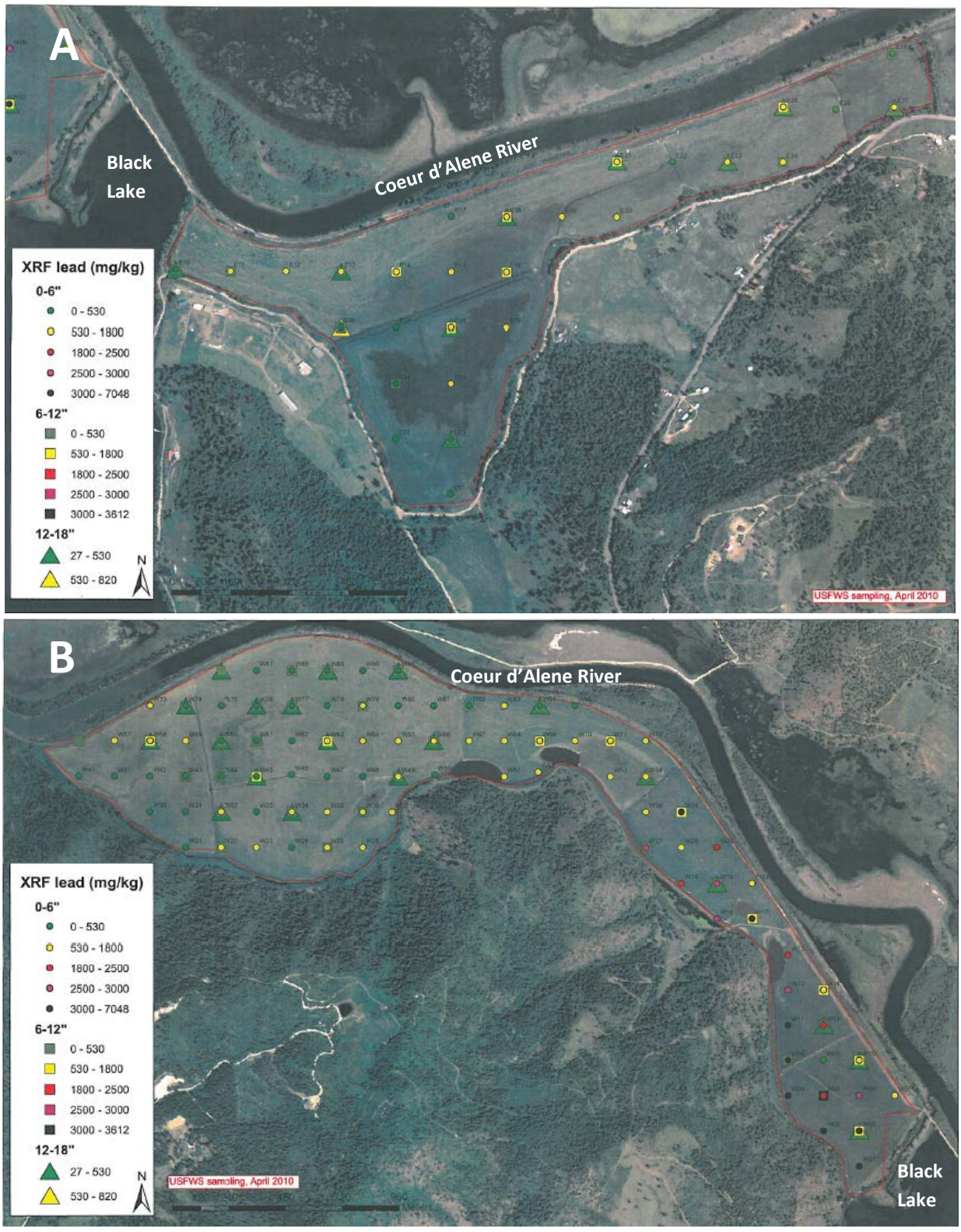

Figure 5. Lead concentrations sampled on the (A) east field and (B) west field of the Black Rock Ranch (source: B. Spears, USFWS technical memo, 2010).

Resources Not Addressed in the Environmental Assessment

Resources not addressed in this EA include resources that are not present in the study area and/or would not be impacted by the Proposed Action. The resources considered for inclusion but eliminated from further analysis based on a no impact determination include:

- Soils – If the Proposed Action Alternative occurs then IDFG and their partners would start remediation actions on the BLR and there are expected to be short-term disturbances of about 675 acres of floodplain area; however, no alterations to the soils in the action area on the St. Maries parcels is proposed in this action

- Prime, Unique, and Statewide Important Farmland –The St. Maries parcels do not include any land that is currently being used for agricultural production. No prime, unique, or statewide important farmlands were identified in the action area; however, agricultural land on the BLR would be returned to functioning wetland habitats if the Proposed Action occurs.

- Floodplains –The Proposed Action would not alter or impair the floodplain associated with the action area, the St. Maries parcels. However, if the Proposed Action occurs, then IDFG and their partners would begin remediation action on the BLR.

- Wild and Scenic Rivers – There are no designated Wild and Scenic Rivers in the action area.

- Wilderness – There are no proposed wilderness areas in the project area, thus the Proposed Action would not disturb lands that are protected now or proposed for protection under the Wilderness Act of 1964, nor would the project introduce any additional lands for consideration as wilderness.

- Climate Change –The Proposed Action would not contribute to climate change, nor would it create vulnerability to climate impacts. Implementation of the Proposed Action will be consistent with Executive Order 13514 Federal Leadership in Environmental, Energy, and Economic Performance.

- Air Quality–The action area is not within a nonattainment area under the Clean Air Act criteria pollutants. The Proposed Action would not cause any violations of or contribute substantially to a violation of any ambient air quality standard. There would be a change in the use of the property as a result of the Proposed Action such that the St. Maries properties would be managed for timber production. The Idaho 2005 emissions inventory indicates sources of pollutants in Benewah County are residential wood heating, tailpipe emissions, paved road fugitive dust, and asphalt paving. With sparse roadway miles and low vehicles miles traveled, wood heating of homes is the predominant emissions source. St. Maries is surrounded by State owned and privately owned timber lands. Slash burning occurs on these lands and is a large emissions source in this area.

- Hazardous Waste – A search of the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality's (IDEQ) Division of Environmental Response and Remediation (DERR) interactive map did not identify any hazardous material sites on the St. Maries WMA parcels. Further, due to its remote location, previous usage, and its designation as a WMA, there is a low probability of encountering hazardous waste in the project area. Still, recreational use has resulted in some debris being found at abandoned hunting camps. The debris consisted of plastic and collapsed corrugated tin.

- Energy –No energy resources exist in the project area, and there will be no changes resulting from the proposed action.

- Environmental Justice Populations –The Proposed Action would not have an adversely high and disproportionate impact on minority or low-income populations. No potentially adverse impacts to environmental justice populations were identified.

- Socioeconomics – There will be no socioeconomic effects of disposal of the four St. Maries parcels. The only economic use of the parcels has been for public recreation. IDFG would retain ownership of parcels fronting the St. Maries River to continue providing access (Figure 1A). Further, the county would gain income from taxes and from possible jobs created with the increased timber production activities.

- Construction Impacts – Construction associated with the development of new roadways to extract and manage timber on the parcels is anticipated as a result of this Proposed Action Alternative.

Biological Resources: Wildlife, Fish Habitat, and Threatened and Endangered Species

Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973 (7 USC §136, 16 USC §1531 et seq.), as amended, requires federal agencies to consult with the USFWS if listed species or designated Critical Habitat may be affected by a Proposed Action. Although no threatened or endangered wildlife species are known to be observed on the St. Maries parcels (see Appendix IV), both the Grizzly bear and Canada Lynx (*Lynx Canadensis*) are present in the region so there may be a remote possibility that they could occur on the St. Maries parcels (Table 3). Snowshoe hare (*Lepus americanus*), known to be a prey for Lynx have been observed on the four parcels (Appendix IV); still, no observations of Lynx have been observed on these lands and much of the habitat is low in elevation and perhaps not attractive to lynx. Grizzly bears are present in North Idaho, and are more common in Boundary and Bonner counties. In recent years, a few grizzly bears are known to have ventured south to the Coeur d'Alene River basin; however, these are relatively rare events especially since the animals would need to cross many roadways and some rail lines to reach the action area. Also in the vicinity, and located on USFS ownership (Township 45 North Range 2 West, Section 26), is a threatened plant Howell's gumweed (*Grindelia howellii*). No observations of this plant have been made on the St. Maries parcels.

No endangered or threatened fish species are known to presently occur in either the St. Maries River or the Coeur d'Alene River. Bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus)* were historically present

in the St. Maries River and the Coeur d'Alene River; however, the species is now functionally extirpated from both river drainages. The Coeur d'Alene River is designated as critical habitat for bull trout, even though the species is not found there, but the St. Maries River is not (50 FR 63898, October 18, 2010). Bull trout are currently present in the adjoining St. Joe River system, so it could be possible that the species might foray into the St. Maries River from the St. Joe River, but no occurrences have been observed.

According to the USFWS Information, Planning and Conservation System (IPaC) (accessed on December 4, 2015), the species listed in Table 4 are migratory birds identified as being birds of conservation concern potentially present on both the St. Maries and the BLR parcels. Birds of conservation concern are species that, without additional conservation actions, are likely to become candidates for listing under the ESA. Species that have been actually observed on the St. Maries parcels are listed in Appendix IV.

Table 3. Threatened and endangered species known in the region but not observed on the action area. There are no critical habitats found within the action area.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
Mammals		
Grizzly Bear	*Ursus arctos horribilis*	Threatened
Canada Lynx	*Lynx canadensis*	Threatened
Fish		
Bull Trout	*Salvelinus confluentus*	Threatened Critical Habitat Coeur d'Alene River only
Plants		
Howellis gumweed	*Cindelia howellii*	Threatened

Table 4. Migratory birds of conservation concern and potentially present in the action area.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Bird of Conservation Concern (BCC)	Seasonal Occurrence in Project Area
Bald Eagle	*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*	Yes	Year round resident
Golden Eagle	*Aquila chrysaetos*	Yes	Year round resident
Calliope Hummingbird	*Selasphorus calliope*	Yes	Breeding
Flammulated Owl	*Psiloscops flammeolus*	Yes	Breeding
Short-eared Owl	*Asio flammeus*	Yes	Year round resident
Western Grebe	*Aechmophorus occidentalis*	Yes	Breeding

Wetland Resources

Although the four St. Maries parcels were part of a larger acquisition primarily oriented around big game winter range, the parcels are not unique in their topography or habitat cover types from the surrounding area. It is noted that large wetland areas like the BLR are rare, whereas the forested habitats on the parcels are more common in the region. Small sections of the St. Maries River flows through the southern portions (comprises about 16 acres) of three of the parcels being traded. In these areas riparian vegetation and wildlife associated with riverine habitat is found.

Cultural Resources

A cultural resources inventory was completed on the St. Maries parcels in 2015 (Appendix VI). The inventory confirmed the presence of an Idaho Historic Sites Inventory (ISHI) Site 09-15797, the Chicago, Milwaukee and Puget Sound Railway. The section of abandoned railway is located in the southwest quarter of Section 21, and along the St. Maries River (Figure 2). In 1909, the transcontinental Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul, and Pacific Railroad (CMSP) reached St. Maries on the path known as the "Milwaukee Road." In the following year, the CMSP entered into an agreement with Potlatch Lumber and the Washington, Idaho and Montana railroad to complete a branch line from the Milwaukee Road mainline in St. Maries south towards the Potlach Mill in Elk River, Idaho. In May 1980, the Potlatch Corporation purchased the Elk River Branch Rail Road (RR), and renamed it the St. Maries River RR and continued limited timber operations in support of large plywood and chip mill facilities in St. Maries. Potlatch Corporation sold the line in 2010, to the Missouri-based Williams Group. The rail line has not been used for many years, however, it retains all seven aspects of integrity (location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association) and exists virtually unchanged since its construction in 1909, with standard maintenance applied.

No other cultural effects were found in a survey of the property. Three fenced vegetation wildlife exclusion plots were found and one modern hunting camp with remnants of corrugated tin, milled lumber, and blue tarp fragments. The lack of clearly defined springs, large confluences, and campsites, such as flat areas with water and good solar exposure, has most likely contributed to an absence of prehistoric resources present in the action area (Appendix VI).

Recreation

Due to its close proximity to the town of St. Maries, the St. Maries parcels are used primarily by local residents for hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, picnicking, horseback riding, snowmobiling, off-road vehicle (ORV) riding, and other outdoor recreation. There are about five undeveloped campsites on the properties, some located in the draws and natural swales in shady areas along the river. IDFG estimated non-consumptive public use equaled the use by hunters and anglers on these parcels. The annual public use was estimated at 2,250 user days (IDFG 1999).

The Coeur d'Alene River WMA public use survey completed in 2005, found that over 18,000 people visited the WMA with 85% being residents of Idaho (IDFG 2005). The reason for the high visitation rate is most likely due to the WMA parcels being highly accessible to the public via vehicle, bike, and/or boat. Fishing is the number one use on the WMA with camping being the second most common activity and hunting being the third most common activity.

Visual Resources

The visual resources of the action area include views of the St. Maries River with a cobbled streambed, the vegetation of mixed trees, shrubs and grasses, and the views to the east of the

WMA above on the hill. The parcels and surrounding areas are composed of mountainous forested habitats with roadways and clear cut areas showing past and recent timber production activities (Appendix III).

CHAPTER 4: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE ALTERNATIVES

Introduction

This chapter will compare the likely outcomes of the Proposed Action Alternative versus the No-Action Alternative, to examine how the choice of alternatives will affect the human environment with either beneficial or adverse consequences. The NEPA requires consideration of direct, indirect, and cumulative effects, plus identification of measures to mitigate these impacts. Impacts are described as follows:

- Direct impacts are those caused by the action and occur at the same time and place (40 CFR §1508.8).

- Indirect impacts are those caused by the action and are later in time or farther removed in distance, but are still reasonably foreseeable (40 CFR §1508.8). Indirect effects are generally less quantifiable but can be reasonably predicted to occur.

- Cumulative impacts are those impacts to the environment which result from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions (40 CFR §1508.7).

Biological Resources: Wildlife, Fish Habitat, and Threatened and Endangered Species

The No-Action Alternative

St. Maries Parcels – Proposed for Disposal

Under this alternative, the management and biological resources of the four disconnected parcels would likely remain the same. The public would continue to access the parcels for hunting and fishing and it would be expected that the cooperative management agreements with BLM and USFS would continue (Table 5).

Since the four parcels have some forest health issues, active forest management would most likely be pursued by the State in the near future. Forested areas would be managed with a focus on wildlife security cover and forage production. Some short-term effects from the forest management activities would include disturbance to wildlife and to their habitats. These disturbances would include increases in noise, human presence, skid trails, soil erosion, and

some changes in visual quality. Over the long-term, however, under the No-Action Alternative no significant change or improvement of wildlife habitat would be likely.

There are high numbers of common wildlife species occurring on the St. Maries parcels now (Appendix IV): still, there are no known occurrences of threatened or endangered species. Migratory birds, passerine species in particular, likely occur in the minor amount of riparian habitat located on the parcels; however, under the No-Action Alternative, there is no reason to expect this riparian habitat to be disturbed or removed currently or in the long-term.

Black Lake Ranch – Parcel Proposed for Acquisition

Under the No-Action Alternative, the BLR would remain in private ownership and the public would be unable to access the area. It is likely that the current owner would sell the ranch and the area would be developed and/or continued to be used for agriculture purposes. In the short-term the TMDL and water quality issues at the ranch would most likely remain unresolved, negatively impacting the aquatic and fishery resources. The TMDL and water quality issues could potentially persist into the long-term depending on how the property is sold and developed.

Also, if the property is subdivided and developed, then it would also be unlikely that the remediation of heavy metals found in the soils on the property would occur. This means that the heavy metals would continue to persist and pollution would accumulate with potential to affect other surrounding areas and migrating wildlife. Functional loss of wetland habitats and the species that they support would likely occur on the BLR property under the No-Action Alternative.

Preferred Alternative

Under the Preferred Alternative it is expected that lands disposed by the State would continue to support wildlife values while new areas acquired would meet the requirements for wildlife restoration and enhancement (Table 5).

St. Maries Parcels – Proposed for Disposal

Under the Preferred Alternative, the St. Maries parcels would transfer to private ownership and the public would lose management and, potentially, access to these forested habitats. It is very likely that upon completion of the exchange the new owners would start to harvest the timber on the parcels. It could be possible in the long-term that the new landowners of the St. Maries trade parcels, or future owners of the parcels might also sell some recreational lots that are near or along the St. Maries River, or on ridgeways where hunting/recreational camp sites currently exist. These permanent home sites might become areas where invasive species are introduced and could be sites of disturbance to wildlife.

Table 5. Comparison of effects and commitments of the action alternatives for the proposed disposal parcels on the St. Maries WMA and the acquisition of the Black Lake Ranch located on the Coeur d'Alene (CDA) River.

Environmental Impacts	Action Alternatives			
	Alternative No. 1 Status Quo (No Action)		Alternative No. 2 Action - Complete Exchange as Proposed	
	St. Maries parcels	Black Lake Ranch	St. Maries parcels	Black Lake Ranch
Direct Effects	• Parcels would remain in public ownership • Public access would continue on WMA • Cooperative management agreements with BLM and USFS to continue • Management would continue to be custodial • Parcels would remain on the Commission's disposal list • IDFG continues FILT payments to county	• Parcel would remain in private ownership with no public access • Functional loss of wetland habitats would continue • TMDL issue would remain unresolved • Ranch property would continue to be used for agricultural production including hay and livestock	• Parcels would transfer to private ownership • Private land gain in Benewah County • Public access to forested lands not guaranteed • IDFG FILT payments are replaced by private tax payments on parcels. • Loss of 1,402.04 acres in public ownership.	• Parcel would transfer to public ownership and provide connectivity of public access along the Coeur d'Alene River • Increased public access to rare habitat type (wetlands) • Public gains management of forested and wetland habitats • New public recreational access to Black Lake • Gain of big game hunting (~292 acres) adjacent to a new 675-acre waterfowl hunting area • Agricultural land loss in Kootenai County
Indirect Effects	• Active forest management would be pursued by State	• Parcel would most likely be sold and developed • Heavy metal remediation is unlikely to occur • TMDL and water quality issues would remain unresolved • Unlikely restoration of CDA Tribal culturally significant plants and opportunities to gather	• Timber on the parcels would be harvested • Forested wildlife habitats are modified, likely change to early seral species and vegetation • Reduction in cavity nesters • Reduction of fire hazard and fuel load	• Agricultural lands would be under public ownership enabling restoration to functional wetlands • 5 miles of CDA river frontage would be protected from development • Contaminated soils could be remediated • TMDL issue could be improved • Restoration of CDA Tribal culturally significant plants

Environmental Impacts	Action Alternatives			
	Alternative No. 1 Status Quo (No Action)		Alternative No. 2 Action - Complete Exchange as Proposed	
	St. Maries parcels	Black Lake Ranch	St. Maries parcels	Black Lake Ranch
				and opportunities to gather
Short-term Effects	• Risk of capital loss to timber value due to disease and wildfire	• Threat of rural and recreational development • Continuing TMDL and water quality issues • Soils could potentially remain contaminated	• Active forest management would likely occur	• Parcel would be highly disturbed during remediation and restoration actions • Temporarily unavailable to public and wildlife during remediation activities
Long-term Effects	• Forested areas would be managed with a focus on wildlife securing cover and not for timber production • Continued threat of wildfire	• TMDL could potentially continue to remain unresolved • Soils could potentially remain contaminated • Loss of potential waterfowl and waterbird production	• Expect the land to continue to be managed for timber production. • Expect some soil erosion, more roadways, change in visual quality, change in wildlife habitats • Continued tax revenue being supplied to Benewah County • Potential loss of public recreational access	Acquisition will enable: • Remediation of contaminated soils completed • water quality improvements • Restoration of impaired wetland habitats (agriculture conversion) • Increase the variety of recreational activities for the public including educational and outreach opportunities • Increased waterfowl and waterbird production • Increase of wildlife diversity and habitats for multiple species.
Irreversible Commitment		• TMDL and contaminated soil issues if left unresolved in the long-term would accumulate	• Loss of soils due to erosion caused by timber production	• Expect the soil contamination issues to be resolved on the floodplain areas once remediation is complete

Environmental Impacts	Action Alternatives			
	Alternative No. 1 Status Quo (No Action)		Alternative No. 2 Action - Complete Exchange as Proposed	
	St. Maries parcels	Black Lake Ranch	St. Maries parcels	Black Lake Ranch
Irretrievable Commitment	• Loss of timber production (loss could be gained back with a change in land-use management)	• TMDL water quality and contaminated soil issues (these issues could be addressed if they are resolved in the short-term)	• Forest habitats would be changed and remain in production status with possible accelerated serial species dominance (loss of older forest cover could be gained back over the long-term if there is change in land-use management) • No guarantee of public access (public access could be provided by private landowner under other programs)	• Loss of agricultural production (loss could be gained back if the water was once more ditched and land drained)
Cumulative Impacts	• Preservation of more mature forest acts as a refuge in timber production landscape	• Heavy metals continue to persist and pollution accumulates with potential to affect other surrounding areas and migrating wildlife	• Overall forested habitats would be reduced to mostly early seral (favoring white-tailed deer, elk, grouse, some migratory birds, but a loss to birds using mature forest)	• Expand available clean functional wetland habitats and provide connectivity of wetland habitats along river. Benefits to birds of riparian, bottomland hardwood, and wetland habitats.

Over the short-term active forest management would most likely occur and all the disturbances to wildlife that these activities bring (i.e., soils erosion, increased roadways, change in visual quality, increased noise and disturbance). It would be expected that the lands would remain in private timber production over the long-term, and so as a consequence, the forested wildlife habitats would be modified, likely changed to early seral species and vegetation. These types of habitats can favor white-tail deer and other early seral species like grouse, some migratory birds and elk.

Most likely the largest impact to wildlife would be from the loss of forested canopy cover and reduction in large logs and snags for nesting and denning. All of these structural habitat elements are important resting and denning sites for many wildlife species like marten (*Martes americana*), squirrels, bats, woodpeckers, flickers, chickadees, and many other small mammal and birds species. If these structures were removed, the species would either avoid or would not be present (Bull and Heather in press; Newton 1994; Tobalska *et al*. 1991; Crampton and Barclay 1995; Perkins and Cross 1988; Ramirez and Hornocker 1981). It is expected that in the short-term, and until the shrub canopy developed, bears would also avoid the disturbed and cleared areas (Kasworm and Manley 1991; Schoen and Beier 1990; Unsworth *et al.* 1989; Young and Beecham 1986).

There are no known occurrences of threatened or endangered species on the St. Maries parcels. However, there are six bird species of conservation concern that occur in this region of the state, but not necessarily in the habitats typical of these parcels (Table 4). Of the bird species of conservation concern in Table 4, the one most likely to be negatively affected by logging activities is the flammulated owl (*Psiloscops flammeolus*). This species nests in tree cavities, preferring large quaking aspen in a mix of older growth Douglas fir and Ponderosa Pine (Powers *et al.* 1996); they eat mostly insects (i.e., moths, butterflies, beetles, and crickets) , but will very occasionally eat small mammals such as shrews and other small rodents (Linkhart 2007). Although the flammulated owl has been observed on the parcels (Appendix IV), no reports of their nesting on the parcels are reported. Short-eared owls (*Asio flammeus*) would be unusual in the forested habitats, as this is a species that is typical of large grassland, wet meadow, and open agricultural mixes where they nest and hunt for small rodents. Timber harvesting activities may potentially increase habitat for this species to the extent that large forest clearings are created. However, this species is generally found in lowland expanses, and is more likely in the BLR property than the St. Maries forested parcels. Calliope hummingbirds rely on forest openings and meadows in a forest matrix with an abundance of wildflowers for foraging. This species may benefit over the long-term if forest openings are created and converted to productive meadow habitats with patchy mixed-aged forests. Eagles tend to have larger territories and would be expected to avoid areas being disturbed by logging activity. It is expected that the flammulated owl would be impacted the most by increased logging activities because of their dependence on large trees for nesting cavities and forage.

Overall, it is expected that the parcels would remain in private timber management in the long-term and the current forest habitats would be changed and would remain in production status with possible accelerated serial species dominance. If the USFS and BLM keep their ownership on Lindstrom Peak (Figure 1A) and continue to manage the forested habitats for wildlife rather than timber production, then these areas over the long-term would become areas of older forested

habitat (>75 years) and refuge for some wildlife that depend on this habitat. The loss of older forest cover could be gained back over the long-term if there is change in land-use management and the parcels are not actively managed solely for timber production.

To protect investments the new owners of the St. Maries parcels would initiate timber harvest and other measures to reduce fuel loading and fire hazard potential. With the aggressive timber management activities on adjacent Lindstrom Peak parcels, the St. Maries parcels are relatively protected from wildfire coming in from the surrounding area; however, the lack of forest management activities the St. Maries parcels provides a significant risk to neighboring timber lands. These concerns by private landowners and the State have been amplified with the recent wildfire activity in the area over the last few years.

Black Lake Ranch – Parcel Proposed for Acquisition

Under the Preferred Alternative, the BLR would transfer to public ownership and provide connectivity of public access along the Coeur d'Alene River providing increased public access to rare wetland habitat types. Under this alternative, the public would gain 1,012.72 acres of private ownership composed of a mix of forested (about 292 acres) and wetland habitats (720 acres), and lose 1,402.04 acres of public ownership of mostly forested habitats on the St. Maries parcels. Because wetland ecosystems are extremely productive and often support higher levels of biodiversity and higher numbers of rare species relative to other ecosystems (Crance 1988; Payne 1992; Merritt 1994; Johnson and O'Neil 2001), it is expected that the Proposed Action would result in the protection and enhancement of wildlife habitats that would support a greater diversity of wildlife than the wildlife habitats located on the St. Maries parcels.

Under the Preferred Alternative, the BLR would become part of the Coeur d'Alene River WMA: This WMA consists of 7,538 acres of wetlands and low lying terrestrial habitats throughout the lower Coeur d'Alene and St. Joe River basins (Figure 1). Protection of the BLR would provide connectivity of wildlife habitats along the Coeur d'Alene River and riparian areas, as well as consistency of management in these areas. This connectivity of wildlife habitats and providing foraging areas free of heavy metals would be beneficial for the fall and spring waterfowl migrations where as many as 20,000 ducks, 2,000 geese, and 500 tundra swans use the area (IDFG 2014b). Tundra swan are highly susceptible to heavy metal contaminant ingestion due to their foraging habits. Swan mortality can result from lethal levels of lead ingested during their migratory stopover (primarily in late winter and early spring) in the Coeur d'Alene River Basin (Beyer *et al.* 1998; Sileo *et al*. 2001). The lower river basins and Lake Coeur d'Alene are also an important wintering area for bald eagles migrating south from Canada. Many of these birds use the Coeur d'Alene River WMA lands for foraging and perching. Under the Preferred Alternative, and in the short-term, the BLR fields would be converted to large areas of clean, secure wetlands that provide linkage and habitat continuity for species that rely on continuous wetland and riparian corridors, and foraging and resting areas for tundra swans, eagles, other migrating and resident waterfowl, waterbirds, and songbirds that prefer wet meadow and riparian habitats.

In the short-term, IDFG would work to remediate the contaminated soils on the BLR and address TMDL and water quality issues at Black Lake. It is expected that there would be some short-

term disturbances to wildlife such as the staging and running of heavy equipment and the movement of soils, seeding and planting on the property. In the long-term, however, it is expected that the agricultural fields would be converted to functional wetland areas composed of a mix of forested, scrub shrub and emergent wildlife habitats. At present, large diameter trees and snags in the lower Coeur d'Alene River floodplain and forested wetland areas are being lost due to high bank erosion and mass wasting of saturated river bank soils caused by the operation of the Post Falls Dam. Under the Preferred Alternative, it would be expected that some of agricultural fields on the BLR would be converted to wetland forested areas that would eventually grow to be dominated by black cottonwood, paper birch, rose spirea, willows, red osier dogwood, and red alder, replacing some of the lost floodplain forest.

It would also be expected that portions of the remediated fields would become marshy with emergent vegetation intermixed with areas of mesic grassland meadow habitats. Mallards and other upland nesting waterfowl require the cover of low growing shrub communities that are adjacent to wetland habitat, and these wildlife habitats would be expected to be developed in the short-term. Nesting habitat can be negatively affected during years with spring flooding resulting in low nesting success and restoration efforts on the BLR would provide additional secure nesting habitat in areas closely associated with good wetland habitat and enhance existing nesting habitat to reduce nest loss. Under this alternative, nesting habitat available to waterfowl and other waterbirds would be increased as would wildlife and habitat diversity.

Cultural Resources

The No-Action Alternative

Under the No-Action Alternative, no change to the known cultural site would be expected; a segment of the Elk River Branch RR (ISHI Site 09-15797) is located on one of the St. Maries parcels and is considered eligible for inclusion under the National Register of Historic Places. No ground disturbing activities near the rail line are planned or proposed relative to the proposed land exchange. Should such activities become part of a proposed project, ISHI Site 09-15797 would be avoided.

Preferred Alternative

Under the Preferred Alternative, no change to the segment of the Elk River Branch RR (ISHI Site 09-15797) would be expected. The new landowners of the St. Maries parcels would most likely harvest timber on the parcels; however, it is unlikely that they would disturb the known NRHP site (ISHI Site 09-15797).

Also under the Preferred Alternative, after protecting the BLR property, IDFG would have the opportunity to partner with the Coeur d'Alene Tribe to restore culturally significant plants and opportunities for Tribal members to gather culturally significant plants on the BLR property.

Recreation

The No-Action Alternative

Under this alternative the St. Maries parcels would remain open to the public for recreation and the BLR would remain in private ownership. IDFG is expected in the short-term to complete some timber management activities, but it is expected that these activities would only temporarily disturb access in some areas of the parcels. Overall, there would be no change in public access or recreational opportunities for the St. Maries parcels. Under the No-Action Alternative, the BLR property would remain in private ownership and the public would be unable to recreate on the property. The public could continue to view the property from the Trail of the Coeur d'Alenes.

Preferred Alternative

Under the Preferred Alternative, the public would potentially lose access to 1,402.04 acres of mostly forested land on the Lindstrom Peak Area in Benewah County, Idaho, in trade to acquire 1,012.72 acres fronting the Coeur d'Alene River and Black Lake located in Kootenai County, Idaho. IDL, BLM and the USFS would continue to manage property on Lindstrom Peak providing public access for hunting. It could be possible that the new private landowners or future landowners of the St. Maries parcels might enroll under programs that would allow public access, and so the public might not lose access to these acres. IDFG would continue to own parcels on the St. Maries River so the public would continue to access the river for recreation and fishing. Five recreational and undeveloped camp sites would most likely not be available to the public for use with the property under private ownership. In exchange, the public would gain access to over a thousand acres fronting the Coeur d'Alene River and would have access to rare wetland habitats. The protection of the BLR would increase the variety of recreational activities for the public including educational and outreach opportunities.

Visual Resources

The No-Action Alternative

Under the No-Action Alternative IDFG would most likely initiate some timber management activities on the St. Maries parcels that could affect the visual resources. However, these impacts would be expected to be minimal as the timber harvest would be for timber health and not for timber production. Also under this alternative, the BLR property would be expected to stay in agricultural use or be developed in to smaller 20 or 40 acre parcels.

Preferred Alternative

Under the Preferred Alterative, the St. Maries parcels would most likely go into timber production resulting in the development of roadways and removal of much of the canopy cover. Over the long-term the parcels would most likely be maintained in a patchwork of mid-seral

communities. Also under this alternative, the extensive fencing on the BLR would be removed and the agricultural fields on the property would be converted to wetland habitat types.

Cumulative Impacts

A cumulative impact is defined in 40 C.F.R. §1508.7 as "the impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions regardless of what agency (Federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time."

Under the No-Action Alternative, IDFG would retain ownership and management of the four St. Maries parcels and the BLR would remain in private ownership. The forested habitats on the St. Maries parcels would continue to mature and would become a refuge in a primarily timber production landscape. Also under the No-Action Alternative, the heavy metal contaminants would continue to persist and pollution would accumulate with potential to affect other surrounding areas and migrating wildlife.

However, under the Preferred Alternative, IDFG would protect the BLR and together with Trustee partners work to remediate the contaminated soils on the ranch and address the TMDL and water quality issues for Black Lake. These actions would expand available clean functional wetland habitats and provide connectivity of riparian and wetland habitats in the Coeur d'Alene basin. Under the Preferred Alternative, the four St. Maries parcels would be transferred to private ownership, and most likely managed for timber production. Overall, the forested habitats on the St. Maries parcels under the Preferred Alternative would be managed similar to the surrounding lands and would be converted to mostly early seral habitats that favor white-tailed deer, elk, grouse, and some migratory birds. Birds that favor mature forest would become less numerous as sites are logged.

CHAPTER 5: COMMENTS AND COORDINATION

Public Involvement

March 23, 2015 – Benewah County Commissioners Meeting; notification of intent to initiate a trade for the four St. Maries WMA parcels.

Coordination and Review of the EA

The Service is seeking public review of the proposed action and will accept all public comments related to this proposed action for a thirty day (30) from the date the EA is published on the website. The Draft EA can be found at:

http://www.idfg.idaho.gov/webform/panhandle-2016-land-exchange

Written comments will be accepted until 5:00pm, March 28, 2016, and can be emailed to the address below:

R1fa_grants@fws.gov or by U.S. Postal Service mail to:

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APPENDICES

Appendix I – 1981 EA

Appendix II – 1990 Supplemental information to the EA

Appendix III - Photographs of the St. Maries WMA

Appendix IV - A list of the wildlife present on the St. Maries WMA

Appendix V – Photographs of the Black Lake Ranch

Appendix VI – St. Maries Wildlife Management Area Cultural Resource Inventory, Benewah County, Idaho