

Meeting Date: January 23, 2020

Agenda Item No. 10

Agenda Item: Rocky Point conservation easements

Approved by: TB

Prepared by: Don Kemner and Steve Elam

Background:

Rocky Point has been identified by the Department as one of the top five priority areas in Idaho to protect big game migration corridors and winter range. The Rocky Point wildlife migration project is a two phase project that intends to protect the mule deer migration of approximately 3-4000 mule deer that migrate biannually across US highway 30 at Rocky Point. For phase one, IDFG purchased two conservation easements to permanently protect 1,844.79 acres of private land in the core of the mule deer migration corridor adjacent to highway 30 in Southeastern Idaho. These easements protect the current use of lands providing mule deer habitat both north and south of highway 30. Phase two will be to construct wildlife crossings under US 30 in cooperation with the Idaho Department of Transportation, to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions and provide migrating mule deer safe passage across US 30.

The two conservation easements were purchased from brothers, Dustin and Jentz Skinner on November 27, 2019 and December 18, 2019 respectively. The terms of both conservation easements are largely identical and allow for continued livestock grazing and ranching, eventual replacement of fencing with wildlife friendly fencing, walk in public access providing for hunting, fishing, trapping and viewing, some limited construction in identified areas, and no subdivision, commercial use, game farming or depredation claims, and continuing support for any/all US 30 wildlife crossing structures. Both easements are held by the Commission and in precluding future development, subdivision, and industrial use, ensure that the land remains a big game migration route, winter range is protected, and current dryland grazing uses can be continued by the landowners.

Partners contributing for acquiring the conservation easements included: Knoblock Family Foundation (\$250,000), National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (\$150,000), Southeast Idaho Mule Deer Foundation/ Sagebrush Steppe Land Trust (\$37,500), PEW Charitable Trust (\$5,000), Idaho Fish and Wildlife Foundation (\$130,000), Southeast Idaho Chapter of Muley Fanatics (\$6,000), Greater Yellowstone Coalition (\$150,000), and Center for Landscape Conservation (\$2,500). The Department contributed \$523,455 plus due diligent costs.

For Phase two, Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) has obligated approximately \$5.5M for constructing two wildlife crossing structures and associated highway exclusion/funnel fence. ITD crossing structure design and public outreach will initiate in 2020, and construction is anticipated to occur during the next 5 years.

These properties were previously presented to the Commission during Executive Session in May 2018 and Open Session in August 2019.

There are no operating and maintenance costs. The Department will have annual monitoring and stewardship costs of the two easements.

FILT is not applicable to conservation easements.

Statutory Authority and/or Policy issues:

Land acquisition in accordance with Commission land acquisition policy.

Public Involvement Process:

Bear River County commissioners were notified.

Staff Recommendation:

Information item only

Suggested Motion: Information item only