

Meeting Date: August 20, 2020

Agenda Item No. 3. F.

Agenda Item: (Action) Recreation Trail Proposal by the US Army Corp of Engineers on the Boise River WMA

Bureau Chief Approval:

Prepared by: Frank Edelman

Background:

The US Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) is proposing to construct a new 15-mile long multiple use trail for bike and pedestrian traffic near Lucky Peak Reservoir. This proposed Lake View Recreation Trail would traverse USACE and Bureau of Land Management lands that the Department manages as part of the Charcoal Creek Segment of the Boise River Wildlife Management Area (BRWMA).

The BRWMA's purpose is to provide quality big game winter range and wildlife-related recreation. Approximately 5,000 to 7,000 mule deer and 1,200 elk winter on the BRWMA depending on winter severity; these migratory animals provide big game hunting opportunity throughout the Boise River watershed. The Charcoal Creek Segment presently contains the highest quality winter range on BRWMA and supports high densities of mule deer.

Construction of the proposed trail and the resulting increase in recreation access and activity will likely cause significant adverse impacts to existing BRWMA conditions by (1) displacing big game from crucial winter range, and (2) threatening long-term range quality by increased risks of wildfire, soil erosion, and invasive species. USACE's trail proposal includes a winter seasonal trail closure and volunteer trail maintenance by the Southwest Idaho Mountain Bike Association.

However, USACE has not properly considered or mitigated significant impacts and alternatives for the proposed trail. The Department has experience with similar trail management in the Boise Front Segment. USACE documents do not appear to realistically assess the agencies' ability (including resource availability) to monitor and enforce the seasonal trail closure, prevent unauthorized pioneering of spur trails from the proposed trail, or mitigate new trail-imposed threats to winter range (*e.g.*, noxious weed control and post-wildfire restoration).

Statutory Authority and/or Policy issues:

The BRWMA management plan prohibits new recreation trails to protect big game winter range. The BRWMA includes management of federal (USACE) lands under USACE License No. DACW68-3-83-10. This license requires that the Department protect USACE lands within the BRWMA from degradation (*e.g.*, wildfire, soil erosion; License Section 4). The trail will hinder the Department's ability to meet its management plan objectives and comply with its USACE License provision for the BRWMA.

Public Involvement Process:

The USACE issued a draft environmental assessment and finding of no significant impact and accepted public comments through June 21. Commissioner Murphy and wildlife conservation organizations asked USACE to postpone a decision to provide opportunities for collaborative evaluation of alternatives among interested parties (*e.g.*, hunting and

other wildlife conservation organizations, mountain bike users). However, USACE has told the Department it is not interested in such a process.

Justification:

The proposed trail conflicts with the BRWMA's purpose and management plan.

Staff Recommendation:

Staff recommends that the Commission send a letter to the USACE opposing the Lake View Recreation Trail. Staff will provide a draft letter for Commission review.

Suggested Motion: I move the Commission adopt staff recommendation to submit a letter to the USACE opposing the proposed Lake View Recreation Trail.