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April 13, 2020

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Kris Tempel,
Habitat Conservation Biologist
490 N. Meridian Road Kalispell, MT 59901
ktempel@mt.gov

Dear Ms. Tempel,

Flathead Audubon Society (FAS) represents about 400 members from northwest Montana. Our mission is to conserve birds, wildlife habitat and ecosystem diversity; promote awareness and appreciation of the natural world through education and advocacy; work with diverse groups and agencies to achieve sound decisions on natural resource issues; provide community services such as school programs, work projects, and field trips.

We have reviewed the proposal for FWP to potentially acquire a conservation easement on nearly 7,300 acres of commercial forest land immediately adjacent to Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge. FAS strongly supports this proposal. Conservation easements in general protect and maintain existing valuable resources and habitats and this proposed conservation easement is even more valuable by reason of being immediately adjacent to Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge where it would provide a buffer and increase the contiguous area under some form of protection. It would help protect the water quality and habitat values of the key drainages feeding a restored Dahl Lake and surrounding wetlands. We are aware that the forested habitats of Dredger Ridge provide nesting and foraging habitat for golden eagles, great gray owls and many other birds of prey and potentially Lewis woodpeckers as well as many other migratory and resident bird species. The lower elevation wetlands that overlap or abut proposed conservation easement lands support a diversity of waterfowl and shorebirds many of which may nest upland such as mallard, wood duck, and hooded merganser. The property also supports all three native upland game birds and lies within historic habitat for sharp-tailed grouse.

FAS supports all of the objectives you stated for this project of preserving important wildlife habitat and providing connectivity between various ecosystems. It will also provide greater landscape scale protection of Lost Trail ecosystems, provide public recreation access, preclude development, and help maintain sustainable timber production and economy.

We look forward to reviewing the draft EA.

Sincerely,

Gael Bissell, President
Flathead Audubon Society