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Nov 26, 2020

Kris Tempel  
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
490 North Meridian Rd.  
Kalispell, MT 59901

Dear Kris,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide scoping comments on proposed Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks acquisition of 800 acres of Columbia Falls Aluminum Co. riparian and forest lands along the Flathead near Bad Rock Canyon. 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 strongly support the proposed project as it would protect high quality and diverse riparian and forested habitats. The bird diversity on these lands is potentially very significant as shown by bird species list prepared by Flathead Land Trust using information derived from E-bird, Montana Natural Heritage Program, Owen Sowerwine Natural Area, and other local resources. The area likely supports waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds. Both conifer and hardwood forests likely support nesting/resident pileated woodpeckers and red-naped sapsuckers, bald eagles, osprey, a variety of owls, and many species of songbirds such as yellow warbler, veery, American redstart, red-eyed vireo, black-headed grosbeak, and western wood peewee. This parcel lies just below Teakettle and Columbia Mountains which is part of a major fall raptor flyway and provides excellent foraging opportunities for dozens of raptor species during migration. A peregrine eyrie is located just above the parcel in Bad Rock Canyon. The area is frequently used by grizzly bears, elk, and deer and the landowners have provided important youth hunting opportunities.

FAS is a partner in the Flathead River to Lake Initiative to conserve important lands along the Flathead River from Columbia Falls south to the north shore of Flathead Lake. This project was identified as a priority project due to its location, size, connectivity, and habitat diversity. These lands are at high risk for development. We support the development of a multi-use trail that is proposed on this property but would like you to consider benefits of limiting some human uses seasonally or closing the area during specific times of the year to reduce risk of human-wildlife conflicts, particularly during winter when big game species are present and spring when bears are present.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide some early input into this potential acquisition and look forward to working with the state and community on this project.

Sincerely,

Gael Bissell, President  
Flathead Audubon Society