

STAFF SUMMARY FOR JUNE 10-11, 2015

25. INITIAL PLM LICENSE AND PLAN (CONSENT)**Today's Item**Information Action

Approve the initial Private Lands Wildlife Habitat Enhancement and Management (PLM) Area 5-year management plan, application and 2015 harvest program for two properties.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions (N/A)**Background**

DFW has reviewed the application and management plan for this property and found that it is in compliance with FGC policies for private lands management (Exhibit 1).

Significant Public Comments

Concerns about hunting elk on Rafter L. Ranch if it becomes part of the PLM Program and requesting that the ranch's application be rejected (Exhibit 3). DFW Regional Manager responded to the comment (Exhibit 4).

Recommendation

FGC staff: Recommends approval under a motion adopting the consent calendar.

DFW: Recommends approving the 2015-2020 wildlife management plans, applications, and 2015 harvest programs under the conditions specified in Exhibit 2.

Exhibits

1. DFW memo
2. PLM initial annual details
3. Letter to DFW from Ron and Patricia Raybourne in opposition to D. Rafter L Ranch, LLC becoming part of the PLM Program, received Feb 2, 2015
4. DFW letter to Mr. and Mrs. Raybourne regarding Rafter L Ranch application for inclusion in the PLM Program, dated Mar 4, 2015

Motion/Direction

Moved by _____ and seconded by _____ that the Commission adopts the Consent Calendar, items 24-27.

2015 MAY 13 PM 1:34

Memorandum

Date: *May, 13*
~~April 21, 2015~~

To: Sonke Mastrup
Executive Director
Fish and Game Commission

From: Charlton H. Bonham
Director



Subject: **Agenda Item for the June 10 - 11, 2015 Fish and Game Commission Meeting Initial Private Lands Wildlife Habitat Enhancement and Management (PLM) Area License**

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has reviewed the Initial Management Plan for 2 properties in 2 counties consisting of 112,523 acres. The Management plan for this property is in compliance with Commission policy requirements for private lands management. The applicant has identified the location where records will be kept and made available for inspection.

Public notices were published in local newspapers, and certified letters were mailed to adjacent landowners with notification of the applicant's intent to enter into the program. No letters of concern were received by the Department for the Big Lagoon PLM; however, we received one letter of concern for D Rafter L Ranch, LLC. The Central Regional Manager, Jeffrey Single, Ph.D. responded to the letter, both are attached.

Habitat improvements accomplished under this plan will enhance and maintain wildlife resources on and around the PLM area. The goals and objectives stated in the management plan are compatible with Department management plans for appropriate species in these areas. In addition, access to public lands will not be diminished under implementation of these management plans.

Post harvest game population surveys were completed on the PLM and surrounding area. Additionally, harvest on the PLM has been considered together with public harvest figures in preparing the hunting program on the PLM. Analysis of the survey data, harvest figures, and the proposed 2015 harvest numbers for the PLM area show no significant adverse effects on wildlife populations resulting from the recommended hunting program.

Sonke Mastrup, Executive Director
Fish and Game Commission
April 21, 2015
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The Department recommends that the Commission approve the specified wildlife management plan, application, and the 2015 harvest program under conditions specified in the attached table.

If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Victoria Barr at (916) 445-4034 or by email at victoria.barr@wildlife.ca.gov.

Attachment

ec: Eric Loft, Ph.D., Chief
Wildlife Branch
eric.loft@wildlife.ca.gov

cc: Craig Stowers, Environmental Program
Manager
Wildlife Branch
craig.stowers@wildlife.ca.gov

Stuart Itoga, Senior Environmental
Scientist
Wildlife Branch
stuart.itoga@wildlife.ca.gov

Victoria Barr, Environmental Scientist
Wildlife Branch
victoria.barr@wildlife.ca.gov

**PLM AREA LICENSE
INITIAL MANAGEMENT PLANS, 2015-2020
PROPOSED SEASONS, HARVESTS, AND HABITAT IMPROVEMENTS**

PLM Area	Proposed Season and Harvest	Habitat Improvement Program
<i>NORTHERN REGION</i>		
BIG LAGOON PLM HUMBOLDT 109,367 ACRES	<p><i>Authorized Harvest:</i> 3 bull elk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue 3 bull elk tags for the period of September 2, 2015 through September 13, 2015. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Enhance coho salmon habitat by harvesting and delivering 35 merchantable trees ranging from 18 to 24 inches diameter at breast height to the restoration site on Little River. The trees will be used and installed as in-stream large, woody debris structures.
<i>CENTRAL REGION</i>		
D-RAFTER L RANCH, LLC. SAN LUIS OBOSPO 3,156 ACRES	<p><i>Authorized Harvest.</i> 1 bull and 1 antlerless tule elk (An additional bull elk may be added in years 3-5 provided the ranch completes its work and the herd data support the increase)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue 1 bull elk tag for the period July 1, 2015 through December 31, 2015. • Issue 1 antlerless elk tag for the period August 15, 2015 through December 31, 2015. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Construct 1 new water source/guzzler to provide more wildlife access to water. ➤ Create 2 new brush piles for use by wildlife. ➤ Add new brush to existing brush piles to enhance use by wildlife. ➤ Construct and install 2 wood duck nest boxes at each of the 8 ponds on the ranch. ➤ Plant 10 acres of pasture mix to supplement feed and cover for wildlife.

To:
California Department of Fish and Game
Attention Mr. Jeff Cann
20 Lower Ragsdale Drive, Suite 100
Monterey, CA 93940

RECEIVED

FEB 02 2015

DEPT OF FISH & GAME
MONTEREY OFFICE

From:
Ron and Patricia Rayborne

Dear Mr. Cann.

We recently received a letter stating that the property next to us, the Rafter L. Ranch, has applied to enter the CDFW Private Land Management Program, and that in exchange for certain, to be honest, small considerations (putting out some water, leaving brush piles and native plants), are asking to be allowed to host the sport hunting of elk on their property for six months each year (July - December).

We would like to state that we are opposed to this plan. Our property lies next to the ranch and we do not think that these magnificent animals should be treated as living bull's eyes for the enjoyment of the trigger-happy. People today do not *need* to kill elk to survive. We, my wife, I, and our young daughter have loved watching the small local elk herd graze in fields near our house, and listening to their shrill, melodic calls. They even occasionally bed down under a tall cottonwood tree not far from our fence. That would very likely end should you approve this plan, ironically characterized as "wildlife protection". Elk have families and lives of their own. They have the right to exist the same as us. What gives some the right to target them for sport *simply because they can*? Sadly, this is an era of extinction. We should be preserving these beautiful animals, the last vestiges of North American megafauna, not further eliminating them. We realize that this would sound silly to hardened hunters, but what if it were *they and their family being hunted for someone's enjoyment*? Then it would be outrageous!

Please understand, we don't write this letter lightly. Our issue is not with the ranch people, we do not wish to stand in their way of supplementing their alfalfa and vineyard income, nor to be unfriendly to them in any way. But we would be less than we are if we didn't speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Is there some other, less objectionable, consideration they can receive in exchange for having their land in this program?

I'd also like to say that we have lived here for over ten years and have only seen elk in the field near us and another field down the road, and once down Hwy 166. I know they are in other areas but I do not believe that their numbers are abundant enough to justify this kind of activity. I have hiked the local Los Padres and Santa Lucias for the last 24 years and have never seen them elsewhere. The other issue is the disruption to the peace six months of shooting guns would bring. Gunshot out here carries far and wide; we are in a bowl shaped valley that is surrounded by hills which hold in and amplify loud sounds. The other alternative, bow hunting, is just plain cruel.

We request that you please reject this proposal in its present form.

Thank you,
Ron and Patricia Rayborne



State of California – The Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
Central Region
1234 East Shaw Avenue
Fresno, California 93710
(559) 243-4014
www.wildlife.ca.gov

EDMUND G. BROWN, Jr., Governor
CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director



March 4, 2015

Mr. and Mrs. Rayborne
[Redacted Address]

Subject: Rafter L Ranch proposal to be included in the Private Lands Management Program in San Luis Obispo County

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Rayborne:

Thank you for your comment letter about the proposal to include the Rafter L ranch in the Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW) Private Lands Management Program (PLM), which has been in existence since 1979. More than a million acres of land on over 100 properties participate in this worthwhile program where landowners conduct positive management actions for wildlife on their properties. In return, they are granted hunting opportunities on their lands that may not otherwise be available. Usually this involves allowing an extended hunting season.

In order to qualify for these opportunities in the PLM program, the ranch has to develop a management plan that details the habitat, discusses management actions that will be carried out to benefit wildlife, and proposes a specific harvest level for a defined season. We have included information about the PLM program with this letter.

You mentioned in your letter that you were concerned that an unlimited number of elk would be allowed to be hunted for up to six months (July-December) on this proposed PLM each year. While you have defined the season correctly, it may not have been clear that the ranch will have a defined harvest limit for elk and whether they are harvested in one month or six, the limit will remain the same. All approved hunt dates and harvest levels will be detailed in the management plan and approved on an annual basis by the Fish and Game Commission. As you were notified, the authorized elk harvest on the proposed PLM is for two bull and one antlerless elk each year. However, initially the harvest level on the ranch would be one bull and one antlerless animal annually. This level could increase to their full authorized harvest (2 bull and 1 antlerless elk) as conditions allow.

The ranch is currently able to hunt elk as part of the existing La Panza hunt zone where licensed hunters participate in the state's annual big game drawing process. Landowners in this zone can also participate in a limited drawing to hunt for elk. The number of tags available in these two drawings for the whole La Panza zone far exceeds the harvest level proposed for the Rafter L ranch under the PLM program

Mr. and Mrs. Rayborne

March 4, 2015

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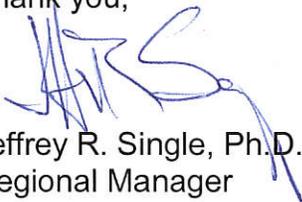
If this ranch is accepted into the program, they will no longer be able to participate in the La Panza hunt drawings and will be only harvesting elk under limits established in the PLM program.

You may be unaware that San Luis Obispo County alone has a tule elk population in excess of 800 animals. In 1971, legislation (known as the Behr bill) passed which mandated that tule elk be protected until their numbers statewide exceeded 2,000 individuals. The legislation was drafted in response to depredation hunting of elk that were causing crop and fence damage in the southern Sierra. By 1987, this goal was achieved and today the state has an increasing tule elk population in excess of 4,300 animals in 22 herds. Subsequent legislation now allows for managed hunting of tule elk.

You also mentioned that "people today do not need to kill elk to survive". Although your statement is correct for most people, the fact remains that many people choose to hunt for the meat they eat because it is as natural and organic as meat can get. We agree that elk are wonderful animals to observe in their natural environment and people all over the state list wildlife watching as their favorite pastime. This PLM has been drafted in consultation with CDFW Biologists who help define conservative hunting limits that will allow hunters and other wildlife enthusiasts to utilize the elk resource for years to come.

Thank you for your concern and interest in the proposal to add the Rafter L to the PLM program. Should you have further questions about the PLM program please call my staff members, Jeff Cann, Environmental Scientist (831) 649-7194 or Rocky Thompson, Senior Environmental Scientist (805) 594-6175.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'JRS', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Jeffrey R. Single, Ph.D.
Regional Manager

ec: Palmisano, Thompson, Stafford, Cann, Victoria Barr, Joe Hobbs

Private Lands Management

Loss of habitat is the single most important challenge facing wildlife populations and wildlife managers today. In response to this problem, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife created the Private Lands Management (PLM) Program, which offers landowners incentives to manage their lands for the benefit of wildlife. This increases benefits to a landowner while preventing the conversion of private lands to land uses that are not compatible with wildlife, such as urban development, grazing and logging. Landowners who enroll in this "ranching for wildlife" program consult with biologists to make biologically sound habitat improvements that benefit wildlife, like providing water sources, planting native plants for food, and making brush piles for cover. In return for these habitat improvements, landowners can charge fees for wildlife viewing, hunting and fishing. This partnership between wildlife managers and private landowners helps conserve and maintain wildlife habitat in our state.

Facts about the PLM Program:

- There are currently 101 PLM properties.
- The program encompasses over 1,003,627 acres of wildlife habitat.
- California has about 101 million acres of land, about half of which is privately owned.
- The largest PLM property is 270,000 acres; the smallest property is 400 acres.
- The average PLM size is about 9,936 acres; half have fewer than 5,000 acres.
- Many wildlife species benefit, including deer, elk, pronghorn antelope, wild turkeys, quail, waterfowl, as well as threatened and endangered species like the bald eagle and red-legged frog.
- The program began in 1979 as a three-year pilot program with five ranches in five counties. In 1983, the California Legislature voted to make it a long-term program.
- Participation in the program requires the submission and acceptance of a sound management plan. PLM areas are licensed for five-year periods; annual reviews ensure that agreed-upon habitat improvements have been made.
- Many PLM properties offer expanded hunting season dates and/or bag limits.

Mr. and Mrs. Rayborne
March 4, 2015
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- Wildlife do not recognize property boundaries between public and private lands, so improvements to a PLM property can benefit adjacent public land as well.

Additional information about the Private Lands Management program may be found at <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/hunting/plm.html>.