

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 12, 2025

Paul Souza
Regional Director, Region 8
Exercising the Delegated Authority of the Director
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
5275 Leesburg Pike, 2N035
Falls Church, VA 22041-380

RE: Draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and associated Environmental Assessment for the Charles M. Russell Wetland Management District

Dear Acting Director Souza,

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Charles M. Russell Wetland Management District (CMR District) that will provide management guidance and an access framework for these public lands for years to come so it is important that this plan improve management and protects hunting and fishing access. To that end, we highlight the importance of selecting Alternative B that expands hunting access on the CMR District and note our strong concerns with Alternative C that that would ban traditional lead tackle and ammunition.

Hunting and fishing are integral in the conservation and management of wildlife and are consistent with the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS). Montana's sportsmen represent some of our state's most passionate stewards of nature. We fully support Alternative B that adds over 1,700 acres for hunting. Opening Hailstone NWR to big game hunting and the north portion of Grass Lake NWR to big game, upland game bird, and migratory game bird hunting will increase access to public lands and create a more cohesive hunting plan for the CMR District.

Additionally, we support the stated goals in Alternative B to increase efforts to prevent damaging wildfires, control invasive plant species, and enhance visitor use and experience. This includes the goal of working with local county commissioners, owners of adjoining lands, and land managers to improve access roads and parking areas for the CMR District.

We oppose Alternative C that would ban the use of lead ammunition and tackle as this would limit hunting and fishing. Unless there is site specific data on the negative impacts of traditional lead ammunition and tackle, this type of ban should be avoided. Policies that restrict the use of lead ammunition or tackle on wildlife refuges reduces access, disproportionately affects lower-income households, and may have negative downstream consequences for wildlife conservation programs that depend on fees paid by sportsmen.

We urge you to move forward with Alternative B that improves public access, hunting, and management of the CMR District.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES
United States Senator



TROY DOWNING
Member of Congress



TIM SHEEHY
United States Senator



RYAN K. ZINKE
Member of Congress