

BLM working on new management plan for portions of eastern MT

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CONNECT



LEWISTOWN, Mont. -

Big game hunting is a big business, especially in counties in eastern Montana. Last year elk hunting alone contributed almost \$4 million to local economies, according to Headwater Economics.

Fergus and Petroleum counties are home to huge blocks of roadless habitat, one of the reasons hunting is so popular there.

Headwaters Economics says Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks recorded more than 25,000 elk hunter days in 2015 on four Fergus County hunting districts. Only 7 percent of those were out of state residents, but they contributed almost half of all expenditures.

Bill Berg lives in Lewistown and is a retired deputy manager with the CMR National Wildlife Refuge. He said hunting is a significant boost to local business.

"People just coming through and purchasing hunting items or food or fuel," he said. "Those kind of things, so it's significant especially in those counties where the population is decreasing. Recreational activities are helping."

Now, those hunting districts in Fergus and Petroleum counties are being addressed in a new Bureau of Land Management "resource management plan."

The region is used for all kinds of recreational activities, like hunting, as well as for farming, and the land's usefulness is why the BLM is working on that plan for their Lewistown field office. It will guide how the BLM manages these lands for the next couple of decades. Protecting wildlife and scenery, and in turn, local economies, are some of the main priorities.

"The fact that there's still a block of short grass prairie in eastern Montana, that has most of the wildlife species that have been there a long time, that and the fact that it's in public ownership and it's available for us to enjoy and use as we see fit," Berg said.

About 750,000 acres of land are covered in the BLM's new plan.