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Contact: Beth Saboe
Senior Public Relations Manager
Phone: 406-600-4906
Email: beth@americanprairie.org

AMERICAN PRAIRIE UNLOCKS MORE PUBLIC LAND IN MONTANA
Conservation organization opens up the 73 and adds more acres to hunting

American Prairie is pleased to invite the public to access and enjoy the wildlife-rich 73 property, located along the east side of the Musselshell River in Garfield and Petroleum Counties. A new management plan spells out where the public can hunt, hike, and recreate, including *new access to 9,300 acres of previously inaccessible public lands*.

The 73 is highly coveted by outdoor users because of its robust wildlife habitat that supports populations of elk, mule deer, pronghorn, turkeys, pheasants, and waterfowl. American Prairie purchased the 73 in late 2021 and staff have spent that last six months familiarizing themselves with the property prior to allowing public access.

Alison Fox, CEO of American Prairie, says opening the 73 for public use is part of the organization's promise to expand public access across their diverse land holdings.

"We know outdoor recreationists and hunters share our deep appreciation for Montana's prairie landscape and its wildlife," said Fox. "Sharing the 73 is a highly rewarding component of our mission and expands the quality of outdoor experiences we can provide to the public."

PUBLIC ACCESS DETAILS FOR 73

A new [visitor map](#) illustrates how the public can access and navigate the 73, which consists of a complex patchwork of deeded property intermixed with state and federal public lands. The new map displays county roads, a designated travel route to public lands, a non-motorized trail winding along Lodgepole creek, and the location of a no-shooting zone along the Musselshell River intended to maintain a safety zone for elk that congregate in irrigated fields during the general hunting season. Access is prohibited in that zone while American Prairie and Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP) study elk use and distribution.

Mike Kautz, Director of Public Access and Recreation, reminds visitors to be prepared for rugged, remote conditions.

“This is an amazing landscape to explore, but it’s not without a few risks,” said Kautz. “We really encourage visitors to come prepared and pay attention to inclement weather conditions, which can leave roads impassable at times.”

On the 73, like all American Prairie properties, e-bikes are allowed on motorized travel routes only.

NEW HUNTING OPPORTUNITIES

An important component of the new access plan is enrollment of nearly 10,000 acres of 73 property into the Block Management hunter access program managed by FWP.

The inclusion of the 73 expands American Prairie's total enrollment in the Block Management program to 79,476 acres for the upcoming hunting season. That’s a 15% increase over the previous year and is spread across ten diverse block management units including Blue Ridge, White Rock, and the PN.

According to Dr. Daniel Kinka, senior wildlife restoration manager for American Prairie, the 73 management plan is consistent with American Prairie’s rewilding goals and how it manages hunting on its other wildlife-rich properties.

“Our philosophy is to strike the right balance between growing healthy wildlife populations and providing high-quality hunting experiences,” said Dr. Kinka. “A healthy prairie ecosystem relies on balanced interactions between predator and prey, which have historically included human hunting on the grasslands. When carefully managed, wildlife populations can continue to grow and thrive amidst human hunting.”

A full list of American Prairie’s BMA inventory is below and more information about hunting opportunities can be found at <https://www.americanprairie.org/hunting>. More details on 2022 BMA’s will be available from MT FWP in mid-August.

Property Name & Map	Acres Enrolled	BMA Type
Two Crow	7,335	2
PN Ranch	20,203	2
Dry Fork	12,310	2
Timber Creek	18,213	1
Blue Ridge	4,489	1

Cow Creek*	1,588	1
White Rock*	3,148	2
Ragland Bench	639	1
73 Ranch	9,978	2
Spring Creek	1,573	1

BLUE RIDGE SPECIAL ELK HUNT

For the third year in a row, American Prairie is offering public hunters an opportunity to hunt bull elk on its wildlife-rich Blue Ridge property, located in southern Phillips County.

For many years, Montanans were unable to access the Blue Ridge property, nestled in the Larb Hills, located approximately 45 miles southeast of Malta. That changed in 2020 after American Prairie purchased the property and opened it to the public for a wide array of recreational opportunities, including the offering of a special limited hunt in prime habitat for bull elk.

A special online drawing is currently being held to award a total of 18 elk hunts on the 9,695-acre Blue Ridge Special Management Area. For the 2022 season, eight archery permit holders and eight rifle permit holders have been awarded an opportunity to hunt bull elk. American Prairie also offered two additional permits for youth-only antlerless elk hunts on the property.

The free drawing is open to hunters who already possessed a permit in districts 620-20, 620-21, 622-20, or a 699-01 youth elk permit. The 18 recipients are randomly selected and will be notified in August.

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About American Prairie

American Prairie's vision is to create a vast and collaboratively managed prairie destination that serves as a fully functioning ecosystem for wildlife, and offers visitors permanent access to the landscape that shaped our nation's character. Already open to the public for recreation including camping and hunting, American Prairie offers visitors an opportunity to connect with nature on a truly grand scale. Learn more at americanprairie.org.