Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

CITIZEN WORKGROUP

Developing Alternatives for Updating the Upper Missouri River Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan (UMRRFMP)
April 20, 2009
MACo Conference Room (Meeting 4)

SESSION SUMMARY

Process Objectives
1. In 6-8 meetings, explore aspects of a fisheries Management Plan for Holter, Hauser, and Canyon Ferry Reservoirs.
2. Within the Workgroup's charter, develop consensus alternatives and recommend those alternatives to FWP.

Session Objectives
1. Learn from the "trap lines".
2. Continue the review and discussion of biological, social, and planning data concerning the Reservoir system.
3. Finalize the Collaborative Framework and move toward alternatives.

Workgroup Members Present

Luckie Bethel	Virgil Binkley	Charles Bocock
Bart Bratlien	Doug Breker	Pete Cardinal
Alex Ferguson	Dale Gilbert	Nick Jones
George Liknes	Tim McAlpine	Dan Nottingham
Darren Raney	Timothy Rauser	Keith Schultz
Dan Spence	Pat Volkmar	Arne Wick
Virginia Tribe (Facilitator)		

FWP Technical Support and Observers

Beth Giddings	Eric Roberts
Chris Hunter	Don Skaar

Completed Agenda Items

"Ratifying" the February meeting summary
Work Group members approved the February 23 meeting summary

Summary of "Trapline" Comments
Work Group members heard the following from their "traplines"

"What's a satisfactory number of fish to catch in a day?"
- Lots of fish in an outing
- Number of fish caught is somewhat important but varies with the angler
- Fish for dinner
- Trophy opportunities on my own; trophy opportunities with a guide

"How would you describe "healthy fish"?"
- Fat
- Robust
- Big
- 18 inches – eating size
- Currently, walleye are not considered "healthy" size.
- Trout being caught are considered healthy – but people wonder about those with no fins.

Some Other Comments
- Many people have little or no knowledge about the Reservoir's management or plan.
- The experience is important.
- Trout folks are happy; walleye folks are not.
- Regardless of FWP's Plan, other regulatory bodies make decisions that have impacts on what happens in the system.
- Pelicans and Cormorants are having an impact on population dynamics.
- People seem to like wilder, naturally reproducing fish.
- Some Perch are being caught but they're small.
- More Pike are being caught in the Toston Reservoir – also Blue Gills and Ling.
- Divers are fining no small "food; more algae than before – deeper and darker; large numbers of Pike; large Sturgeon; large Ling in Holter; fewer minnows on the surface.
- Holter is viewed as doing well.
- People still like to catch salmon and a few are.
- There are crowds at access places – especially with good weather returning.

Focused Information Sharing/Discussion about the Reservoir
Per requests of the Workgroup in February, FWP personnel presented further information regarding coldwater species and their systems; the influence and condition of Northern Pike and other species; and the role of some birds like Pelican and Cormorants in the system. (Details in material distributed by FWP at the meeting and available in CD form from FWP)

In addition, the Workgroup discussed interactions and interpretations with FWP personnel and identified areas where further discussion is necessary based on differing opinions. Workgroup members and FWP personnel also made comments about the current Management Plan – some comments in support and agreement with portions of

the Plan and some in disagreement. That discussion will continue as the Workgroup moves into suggested revisions for the Plan and development of recommended alternatives.

Finalizing the Collaborative Framework

Guiding Principles

- We believe that the bodies of water in the Upper Missouri River Reservoir System should be managed as separate systems including the stretches of River that connect those bodies.
- We seek a multi-species approach to management of those bodies and the system as a whole.
- We believe that management goals and strategies for the system should result in healthy age class distribution and growth rates for those multi-species.
- At the same time, we believe that the system as a whole, cannot tolerate additional predatory species (i.e., Northern Pike) and that the Management Plan should include strategies accordingly.
- We believe that maintenance, enhancement and diversification of forage species are critical to the health of the system.
- We believe that some bird species are influencing the system and that the Management Plan should explore and address that issue.
- We believe that the changing dynamics of the system and its parts require a well-defined adaptive management strategy and process, and that adaptive management should be an integral part of the Management Plan.
  We believe that a useful adaptive management strategy should include triggers and benchmarks that help drive ongoing management decisions and regulations.
- We believe that the Management Plan should be science-based but recognize that social and economic factors play a large role in achieving social acceptance. We believe that biology and social interests share goals.

Goals/Desired End Results

The Upper Missouri Reservoir Management Plan should result in:

1. Management of all 3 Reservoirs and connecting River Sections as healthy multi-species fisheries.
2. Strategies that emphasize Trout and Walleye while recognizing Perch as an important game and forage species.
3. Improved forage species and availability for game fish in the Upper Missouri.
4. Realistic regulations and limits while providing a high level of angler satisfaction.
5. Social acceptance based on shared biologic and social/economic interests.
6. An adaptive management plan and process to react to the changing dynamics of the system and adjust accordingly.

Important Questions to be Addressed/Answered in the Management Plan

- What species should be featured in each body of water and what should that look like?

- Within each featured species, how can we achieve optimum size and age distribution of fish?
- How can the forage base be improved to feed game fish in the system and its individual parts?
- What role can anglers play in positively affecting population dynamics?
- How can featured game fish species be managed to provide a high level of angler satisfaction in the upper Missouri?
- What are satisfactory angler catch rates? Is this the most important evaluation criteria in development of the Management Plan?
- How can regulations and limits be used and evaluated to effectively manage game fish populations to meet established goals?
- How can the Plan respond to the social concerns of Montana anglers to encourage support from the public?
- How can the Plan adapt to changes in the dynamics of each Reservoir and connecting waters over the next 10 years?

First Shot at Brainstormed Strategies

Ideas related to Forage
- Habitat improvements; prioritize habitat enhancement
- Stocking
- Pilot "fences" (Charles B.)
- Continue Christmas trees for egg protection
- Create/enhance ponds; raise Perch in flooded natural ponds
- Lower water levels occasionally for Perch development
- Control predation; increase limits on unwanted predator species
- Locate telemetry – WE and Perch critical habitat
- Plant forage fish/alternative food source (i.e., spot tail, cisco, shiners, smaller trout, etc.)
- Increase commercial harvest of carp
- Address the bird issue (i.e., hazing; hunting, etc.)
- Teach anglers to keep/use smaller fish caught

Ideas related to Walleye
- Slot limits
- Reduce limits

Ideas related to Trout
- Business as usual but monitor to see if affected by other strategies
- Enhance natural reproduction

Other Ideas
- Maintain insects
- Address oxygen depletion using wind turbines

- Get involved in water quality issues like nitrates (i.e., public education; working with local governments, etc.)

Where do we go from here?

"Homework"
Before the March 6 meeting, Workgroup members are asked to:
- Revisit the April 20 meeting summary and be prepared to affirm the Collaborative Framework.
- Visit "traplines" and continue the conversation.
- Come prepared to problem solve toward alternatives.

Calendar
- Next meeting – Monday, May 4; MACo Building; 8:00 AM – 5:00 PM with lunch
- The Workgroup hopes to complete their draft alternatives by the June 8 meeting (they will add one if absolutely necessary) so FWP can draft the Plan and get it out for public review this summer. Group members also agreed to attend the public meetings and meet in the early Fall to review public comments and finalize their recommended alternatives.