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Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

MINUTES

Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission Meeting

Fort Peck Fish Hatchery, Fort Peck, MT

May 22, 2014

Commission Members Present: Dan Vermillion, Chairman, Richard Stuker Vice-Chairman, Larry Wetsit, Gary Wolfe and via Video: Matthew Tourtlotte

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Staff Present: Jeff Hagener, Director and FWP Staff.

Guests: May 22, 2014 - See Commission file folder for sign-in sheet.

Topics of Discussion:

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of Minutes of April 10, 2014 Commission Meeting
3. Approval of Commission Expenses
4. Commission Reports
5. Director's Report
6. Water Supply & Fish Health Rule Updates – Informational
7. Musselshell River Project – Tate Ranch – Endorsement
8. Cow Creek Instream Flow Lease – Endorsement
9. Trout Bag Limit Waiver for Camas Lake and Elkhorn Creek – Proposed
10. Big Hole River and Powerhouse FAS Closure Rule – Final
11. Clark Fork River Mitigation Phase 1, 2, 5 & 6 Closure Rule – Final
12. Blackfoot River at I-90 Bridge Closure Rule Amendment – Final
13. Moose, Sheep, Goat Quotas Outside Biennial Quota Ranges – Final
14. Region 6 Bighorn Sheep/Domestic Sheep Commingling Management Area – Final
15. Bighorn Sheep Augmentations and Transplants – Endorsement
16. 2014 Wolf Season - Proposed
17. Voluntary Wolf Management Stamp – Proposed
18. SB 200 Wolf Quota – Proposed
19. 2014-2015 Furbearer Season and 2014 Quotas – Proposed
20. 2014 Upland Bird Quotas and Limits – Proposed
21. Nongame Tax Check-off Work Plan – Proposed
22. HB 454 Access Agreements – Proposed
23. Avista Cooperative Management Area - Proposed
24. Robb Ledford Grazing Lease – Final
25. Request for Sage Grouse from Alberta - Informational
26. Public Comment – For Issues Not On This Agenda

1. Call to Order - Pledge of Allegiance
Chairman Vermillion called the meeting to order at 8:31 a.m. and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Approval of Minutes of April 10, 2014 Commission Meeting
Action: Commissioner Wolfe moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded the motion to approve the April 10, 2014 minutes. Motion carried.

3. Approval of Commission Expenses
Action: Commissioner Stuker moved and Commissioner Wetsit seconded the motion to approve the Commission expenses. Motion Carried.

4. Commission Reports
Commissioner Wetsit reported he has received correspondence on numerous issues: management on Flathead Lake, mountain lion management; sage grouse; wild buffalo on the landscape; and furbearers.

Commissioner Wolfe reported the 12 member mountain lion advisory council was formed; very impressed with the work that will be presented at the June Commission meeting; complimented Region 2 staff for all the work. Attended a portion of the Public Land/Public Wildlife (PL/PW) meeting in Missoula; introduced himself and met the participants on the council. FWP Lands committee, which he is a member, met in Helena; committee is conducting an audit on inquiring fee title and conservation easement (CE) properties; will be looking at land trust alliances standard practices. Numerous correspondence regarding: mountain lions; elk brucellosis; Robb Redford grazing lease; bobcat tagging requirements; bison issues; and sage grouse.

Commissioner Stuker reported he has had conversations with different groups regarding how the Department and Commission will work with group recommendations on proposals and other procedures; would like to have a discussion on how the Department and Commission work with groups and organizations. Had conversations regarding: elk numbers; bison; CSKT/Flathead Lake Flathead Lake issue; furbearers; and sage grouse. Received information from Rod Bullis regarding Region 1's past mountain lion issues. Attended paddlefish and intake tour with other Commissioners; very informative; thanked Brad Schmitz and Region 7 employees. PL/PW have met twice since the last meeting; next meeting will be held in Miles City in June; hope to have recommendations for the public at the June meeting.

Chairman Vermillion reported he has had conversations regarding the Paradise Valley elk brucellosis legal proceedings; has worked with Representative Redfield and Sam Milodragovich to keep the situation out of the court system; commend both individuals for the work. Worked with Zack Strong, Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) on the wolf stamp recommendation. Conversations on Region 2 mountain lion proposal. Thanked Region 7 for the Commission tour; enjoyable and informative. Received a letter and several phone calls from the Laurel Rod and Gun Club requesting to have a work session with the Commission to discuss the five week season; would like to have a work session meeting in August.

Commissioner Tourtlotte reported he received several telephone calls and correspondence regarding mountain lions; Robb Ledford grazing lease; sage grouse; and how the Department approves grazing leases on WMAs, would like a work session to discuss grazing lease procedures Toured the Musselshell River project; beautiful piece of property; great opportunity; asked the Commission to unanimously support the project.

5. Director's Report

Director Hagener reported he attended a meeting in Denver on Intake; FWP, Department of Natural Resource and Conservation (DNRC), Bureau of Reclamation and Army Corps of Engineers are working on the final approach of the multimillion dollar Intake project; 10 year project that needs to be completed before a major problem occurs. The Paradise Valley elk brucellosis lawsuit primary point of contention are kill permits; looking at having a brucellosis work panel for discussions with different constituents; need to work together. A lawsuit has been brought forward on the Bitterroot River closure between two fishing access sites (FAS) for safety concerns; will be an interesting discussion. Proposals for the Quarantine Feasibility Bison that have been on the Green Ranch for five years have been put out; must be moved by November 15; received 10 proposals, 2 instate (Fort Peck Tribe, American Prairie Reserve) and 8 from around the nation; a lot of issues to be discussed; convening a panel to look at the proposals. FWP attended the Environment Quality Council (EQC) meeting; gave updates on grizzly bears, sage grouse, wolves and bison; EQC has instructed their staff to draft a bill based on the proposals of the Licensing and Funding Advisory Council; positive step; conducting meetings around the state to discuss the proposals. PL/PW Council is making progress. Talks taking place internally on the five week hunting season.

6. Water Supply and Fish Health Rule Updates – Informational

Bruce Rich, Fisheries Administrator gave a brief update on the water supply throughout the state. Staff has been working diligently on updating the fish health rule; gave reasoning for update.

7. Musselshell River Project – Tate Ranch - Endorsement

Bruce Rich, Fisheries Administrator explained the intention of this project is to conserve terrestrial and aquatic habitats, associated riparian and upland habitats and allow for angling, hunting, and other recreational use on 635 acres about two miles along the Musselshell River. The project would include fee title, CE and remove fish barriers that have blocked fish passage for more than a century; water rights could benefit the aquatic environment during critical flow periods are included. Landowner Robert Tate expressed interest in having a conservation entity acquire the water rights and the land as extensive damage occurred to the existing irrigation infrastructure during the 2011 flood. Public involvements included an April 14 field visit with Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust (FWCT); met with two adjoining landowners about the opportunity for a partnership that may include both fee title and a CE; met with another adjoining landowner about opportunities to conduct damaged diversion dam removal and subsequent bank remediation; met with Conoco-Phillips on the potential for an easement donation on a 24-acre right-of-way. If endorsed to proceed, FWP would formally evaluate the location to include an environmental assessment (EA), with public notices and opportunities for review and comment; the project would include a combination of both fee title and CE. The Department has obtained an initial commitment of $100,000 from the FWCT. FWP sees the proposal as a potential partnership and funding between FWCT, State Fish and Wildlife Grant, Fishing Access Site (FAS) funding, Conoco Phillips, and a partnership with an adjoining landowner on a CE.

Action: Commissioner Tourtlotte moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded the motion that the Commission endorse the Musselshell Conservation-Tate project, and direct Fish Wildlife and Parks Region 5 to proceed with conservation funding partners and with negotiations with the adjoining landowner.

Chairman Vermillion asked what fish are being discussed.

Mike Ruggles, FWP Biologist stated a fair population of smallmouth bass and occasional catfish; opportunity to reestablish catfish, sauger and ling fish populations.

Commissioner Tourtlotte stated there is a lot of opportunity on this land.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

8. Cow Creek Instream Flow Lease – Endorsement

Bruce Rich, Fisheries Administrator explained the dam on Cow Creek Reservoir on the east side of the Bear Paw Mountains was repaired as part of a Future Fisheries Project, approved by the Commission in August 2010. Cow Creek above the reservoir supports a brook trout fishery, while Cow Creek Reservoir supports a popular mixed fishery including walleye, tiger muskellunge, yellow perch, channel catfish, black crappie and brook trout. The project agreement calls for the owner, Sand Creek Ranch, not to divert water from Cow Creek Reservoir or Cow Creek for a period of 20 years. In 2013, DNRC completed its examination of the associated water rights as part of the general adjudication and found a portion of the water rights should be temporarily changed to instream flow, which requires Commission approval. The Future Fisheries Improvement Program's (FFIP) review panel evaluated the project as part of a public review process and recommended approval. If approved, FWP will make application to DNRC to temporarily change a portion of the landowner's water right to instream in Cow Creek; DNRC would conduct an environmental review of the proposed change to instream flow. This application would be noticed to the public, and affected parties would have the opportunity to comment on the change to instream flow. There would be no additional monetary compensation for the water right lease beyond what has already been provided through the FFIP.

Action: Commissioner Stuker moved and Commissioner Wetsit seconded the motion that FWP negotiate a water-right lease on Cow Creek with Sand Creek Ranch, subject to final approval of the Commission.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

9. Trout Bag Limit Waiver for Camas Lake and Elkhorn Creek – Proposed

Bruce Rich, Fisheries Administrator explained FWP is asking the Commission to propose for public comment, temporary fishing regulation changes that would waive the daily harvest and possession limits in Elkhorn Creek and Camas Lake. The waivers would provide additional angling and harvest opportunities in advance of FWP's removing Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YCT) and hybridized Westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) from these waters. The 2013 Statewide Fisheries Management Plan describes WCT conservation goals within major drainages and individual waters; in both the Upper Missouri and Smith River drainages, the long-term goal is to have approximately 20% of the historically occupied habitat restored to secure conservation populations of cutthroat trout; the Upper Missouri Elkhorn Creek drainage, conservation goals include completion of a barrier and removal of hybridized fish above the barrier; the Smith River drainage plan states that efforts are needed to evaluate restoration of WCT to Camas Lake. For Camas Lake, a chemical treatment in late August 2014 will be used to remove YCT; Elkhorn Creek, electrofishing will be used to remove the majority of hybridized WCT between the barrier and the confluence of the east and west forks. FWP has already completed EAs for the projects; will conduct a 30-day public comment period and present final recommendations at the July Commission meeting. Regulation waivers would go into effect immediately through August 15, 2014. The waters are somewhat remote; the number of anglers who avail themselves of this opportunity will be small; limit waivers create good will and support and enhance the project goals of genetic purity; waivers have been successfully used in the South Fork Flathead cutthroat conservation projects numerous times over the past five years and has been popular with the public.

Action: Commissioner Wolfe moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded the motion that the Commission propose to waive the daily and possession bag limits through August 15, 2014 for Camas Lake and the portion of Elkhorn Creek from the concrete fish barrier approximately 0.9 miles upstream to the confluence of the east and west forks of Elkhorn Creek.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

10. Big Hole River and Powerhouse FAS Closure Rule – Final

Bruce Rich, Chief of Fisheries explained in March the Commission proposed a rule that would enable FWP to temporarily close the Powerhouse FAS and a section of the Big Hole River for public safety reasons. The Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) notified FWP of its intent to conduct repairs and upgrades to Silver Bridge on the Big Hole River beginning July 1, 2014; Silver Bridge is adjacent to the Powerhouse FAS. MDT will require the contractor to provide safe public float passage, including a 40-foot effective opening between instream construction-related obstructions, and appropriate navigational signage and hazard posting. MDT does not anticipate that the construction will create conditions that require temporary closures of the river or the FAS; as a precaution MDT requested a rule that would authorize FWP, in consultation with the local Commissioner, to temporarily close the river and/or the FAS

during the construction timeline July 1-December 1, 2014; the contractor will be required to notify FWP of such a request. The Department will make it clear to MDT and the contractor that the Big Hole is very popular and important to the regional tourism economy, and FWP will only consider closures if there are no other reasonable alternatives. FWP received five comments generally supportive of the closure rule; some people pointing out the effective dates are important, they did not want the potential closure during the month of June, presumably when the salmon fly hatch is occurring; two people were concerned about the potential for a closure in July and preferred that the construction not take place until August. The Commission could choose not to propose a rule closing the river; this could lead to emergency conditions that would precipitate the adoption of an emergency rule to close the river and/or the FAS; the Commission could change the effective start date of the closure authority to later in the summer but it would not coincide with MDT's construction window and therefore could result in the need for emergency closures or a delay in construction. The Department recommends the Commission adopt the rule with one amendment to help clarify that FWP would have the authority to close to floating the Big Hole River from Greenwood Bottom FAS to 1,000 feet below the Silver Bridge construction site; this amendment is necessary to avoid someone launching at Greenwood Bottom with the intent to take out at Powerhouse.

Action: Commissioner Stuker moved and Commissioner Wetsit seconded the motion that the Commission adopt an annual rule authorizing the Department, in consultation with the local Commissioner, to temporarily close a portion of the Big Hole River and/or the Powerhouse Bridge Fishing Access Site to address public safety concerns related to the repair of Silver Bridge from July 1 - December 1, 2014.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

11. Clark Fork River Mitigation Phase 1, 2, 5 & 6 Closure Rule – Final

Bruce Rich, Fisheries Administrator explained in March the Commission proposed rules requested by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) that would close portions of the Clark Fork River and the Warm Springs Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The recommended final rule does not contain any changes to the proposed rule (see minutes from the March 13, 2014). FWP received no comments during the comment period; five people expressed support for the closure rules prior to the comment period.

Action: Commissioner Wolfe moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded the motion that the Commission adopt the rules requested by DEQ and presented by FWP that would close portions of the Clark Fork River and the Warm Springs WMA related to Phases 1, 2, 5 and 6 of the Milltown Reservoir/Clark Fork River Superfund Site.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

12. Blackfoot River at I-90 Bridge Closure Rule Amendment – Final

Bruce Rich, Fisheries Administrator explained in March Commission proposed a biennial rule that would close the Blackfoot River from the Weigh Station FAS to the downstream side of the I-90 bridges to floating and swimming from May 1-June 30. The rule would allow FWP, with approval by the local Commissioner, to temporarily close the river between July 1-April 30, if the river conditions present a significant public safety concern. This section of the river has been closed to all floaters and swimming since the summer of 2006 due to numerous man-made hazards associated with the Milltown Dam Superfund site and removal of Stimpson Dam. On April 11, the Commission amended the closure to allow public occupation of the banks for recreation; boating, floating and swimming remained prohibited due to ongoing safety concerns. FWP and other state agencies are still pursuing a long-term solution that will address safety concerns related to the I-90 bridge piers. The river is constricted by rip-rap under the bridge which generates turbulent hydraulics during higher flows as it passes by the bridge piers; the river is also expected to continue adjusting its bed elevation after removal of the dams, which could reveal more logs and debris during high flows. The proposed rule is a temporary solution that would allow use of this section of river when flows are generally low enough to reduce danger in the area. FWP received 40 comments, including 16 in support of the closure rule as proposed; 6 in support of a closure with requests it be flow-based rather than calendar-based; 18 comments were in opposition and noted that all rivers are dangerous, and it is the user's responsibility to determine whether they are skilled enough for the conditions. FWP recommends the Commission adopt the rule as originally proposed with amendments to include language further clarifying the source of the hazardous conditions and to allow FWP to open the river prior to June 30 if annual high river flows associated with spring run-off have decreased sufficiently and are unlikely to increase again before May 1 of the following year; this would enhance recreation opportunities if conditions have improved.

Action: Commissioner Wolfe moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded the motion that the Commission adopt a biennial rule closing the Blackfoot River from Weigh Station FAS to the downstream side of the I-90 bridges from May 1 - June 30, with authority granted to FWP to close the river outside of this time period for significant public safety reasons, and to open the river during the closure period if flows have decreased sufficiently.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Wolfe stated this particular area is close to an urban population and gets tremendous amounts of use by inexperienced recreationists.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

Steve Dalbey, Region 6 Fisheries Manager explained and gave an update on the Region 6 paddlefish season 6.

13. Moose, Sheep, Goat Quotas Outside Biennial Quota Ranges – Final
Quentin Kujala, Wildlife Management Section Chief explained biennial quotas for moose, bighorn sheep and mountain goat licenses were adopted as final in February to set minimum and maximum numbers of licenses that may be annually issued without additional Commission review for any single license type. Field survey efforts have identified one sheep license type where the prescribed 2014 quota is outside the adopted range. This proposal is unchanged from the original adoption (see minutes from the April 10, 2014 meeting).

Action: Commissioner Wetsit moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded the motion that the Commission approve as final the annual moose, sheep and goat quotas as proposed by FWP.

Chairman Vermillion, Director Hagener, Region 6 Supervisor Tom Flowers and Kujala had a discussion on moose quotas and regulations.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

14. Region 6 Bighorn Sheep/Domestic Sheep Commingling Management Area – Final
Quentin Kujala, Wildlife Management Section Chief explained Region 6 has bighorn sheep populations in the Missouri River Breaks in hunting districts (HD) 622 and 680, and a small bighorn sheep population in the Little Rockies HD 620, an island mountain range close to the Missouri River Breaks. Montana is currently home to approximately 5000 bighorn sheep; management of the species can be challenging with issues ranging from limited habitat to highway mortality, disease and small population sizes; one management strategy is wide separation between bighorn sheep and domestic sheep and goats. In Region 6 there have been several instances where bighorn sheep, typically young rams, have wandered outside of the defined bighorn sheep habitat within the vicinity of domestic sheep herds. To minimize commingling, potential disease transmission and breeding between bighorn and domestic sheep, FWP is proposing to establish a Region 6 commingling management area (CMA) which would encompass land well outside bighorn sheep habitat; bighorns that wander into this area could be dispatched by FWP to prevent the possibility of commingling. This CMA would be all Region 6 lands outside the Rocky Boy, Fort Belknap and Fort Peck Indian Reservations as well as those lands outside bighorn sheep HD 680 and deer/elk HDs 621, 622, 631 and 632, with the exception of bighorn sheep habitat adjacent to the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation. The bighorn sheep habitat adjacent to the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation excluded from the CMA includes the following sections: Sections 1, 2, 11, 12, 13, 14, 23, 24, 25, and 26 in Township 28N Range 14E; Sections 7, 8, 17, 18, 19, 20, 29, and 30 in Township 28N Range 15E; Sections 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 34, 35, and Section 36 in Township 29N Range 14E; in unique circumstances, FWP may authorize a landowner to dispatch a bighorn sheep in this area when FWP is not able to immediately respond; based on experience, only small numbers of bighorn sheep in isolated circumstances would be lethally removed. Twelve comments were received; one response from the Rocky Boy Tribe in opposition, FWP has clarified the exclusion of reservation lands and adjacent bighorn habitat from this management area. FWP recommends the Commission endorse the Region 6 Bighorn Sheep/Domestic Sheep CMA to clearly communicate FWP's intent and authority to dispatch bighorn sheep in this area to reduce the possibility of commingling between bighorns and domestic sheep.

Action: Commissioner Wetsit moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded the motion that the Commission approve as final the Region 6 Bighorn Sheep/Domestic Sheep Commingling Management Area as presented by FWP.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Representative Bridget Smith, Wolf Point, prefers capture not kill.

Jim Brown, Montana Wool Growers Association (MWGA), supports proposal; would appreciate the Department's support in letting the public know that this proposal did not come from the domestic sheep industry.

Chairman Vermillion asked the Department to advise the public this is a FWP proposal; need to find other places for bighorn sheep to roam in the state without impacting the domestic sheep production and recognizing the public concerns.

Steve Schindler, Glasgow, asked if captured, is there testing done for disease.

Commissioner Stuker asked how much testing is required and how long does it take.

Kujala stated yes, testing is done; not an immediate response time.

Commissioner Wolfe asked what would be the disposition of the carcass.

Kujala stated first priority is to the FWP disease research lab and then donate to a food bank.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

15. Bighorn Sheep Augmentations and Transplants – Endorsement

Quentin Kujala, Wildlife Management Section Chief explained trap and transplant of bighorn sheep is an effective management tool and the removal of sheep assists population control. Transplanted animals can ultimately represent new populations or augment existing ones. Funds from auction licenses are available for transplants with all animals receiving a health assessment at capture. The potential new releases are presented for endorsement by the Commission; final Commission endorsement for the new transplant would come after additional formal public review to include an EA; augmentations of existing populations and sheep captures from source populations may take place with Commission endorsement; these types of management actions and associated process are consistent with the Montana Bighorn Sheep Conservation Strategy. Final Commission endorsement would come in late summer or fall after formal public review.

Bighorn Sheep

- Transplant sheep in the Bear/Indian Creek areas of the Madison Basin. This new release was initially planned for early 2014 with the EA and final Commission approval is already in place. The release did not happen due to disease concerns but will be pursued again this coming fall or winter. The primary first source population would be the Madison herd.

- Proposed additional review of the Livingston Peak area in the Paradise Valley. Before any transplant could occur, a formal EA would be conducted with final approval by the Commission at a later date.

- Bighorn sheep from HD 482 (Missouri Breaks south of Missouri River) have been identified as a source population needing population management (reduction).

Action: Commissioner Wolfe moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission confirm again the new transplant in the Madison, endorse HD 482 as a source population and endorse continued review for a potential new release in the Livingston Peak area as presented by FWP.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Jim Brown, MWGA, appreciates Kujala reaching out to MWGA; supports endorsement. MWGA has supported every bighorn sheep transplant area that has been brought forward the last three years; asked not to transplant bighorn sheep in areas where domestic sheep currently are.

Nick Gevok, Montana Wildlife Federation (MWF), support endorsement; appreciates Mr. Brown's comments.

Chairman Vermillion would like the Department to take a look with different user groups, an opportunity to expand the plan that would allow flexibility, still keeping the landowner and domestic sheep protections in place, but give opportunity to try new things the current plan does not allow.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

Director Hagener stated his Nebraska counterpart indicated if any bighorn sheep are captured this winter, they would be interested in them.

Chairman Vermillion stated the sheep need stay in the State of Montana.

Commissioner Stuker stated his first choice would be to transplant the sheep within the State, then look at different options.

Commissioner Wolfe and Wetsit concurred with Commissioner Stuker's statement.

16. 2014 Wolf Season – Proposed

Quentin Kujala, Wildlife Management Section Chief explained regulated public hunting and trapping of wolves was endorsed by the Governor's Wolf Advisory Council in 2000 and is included in Montana's wolf conservation and management plan. WMU boundaries were modified for 2012–13; no statewide quota and trapping was added as a method of take from December 15- February 28. The regular rifle season was expanded to run from October 15, 2012 - February 28, 2013; the Commission approved a 3-wolf bag limit that was implemented with the passage of House Bill 73; by season end trappers harvested 97 wolves and hunters harvested 128. Changes implemented for the 2013–14 wolf season included adjusting the archery season to run from September 7–14; the rifle season September 15-March 15; the bag limit was 5 wolves per person in any combination of wolves taken by hunting or trapping; WMUs 313 and 316 north of Yellowstone National Park (YNP) had quotas of 4 and 3 wolves respectively; trappers were required to dispatch wolves via gunshot; Regions 1–5, trappers were required to set pan tensions on wolf traps to 10 pounds to minimize the take of lynx, wolverines, and other non-target species. For the 2014–15 wolf season the proposed adjustments are to reduce the closure period in WMUs 313 and 316 from 24 hours to 12 hours; this will have the effect of closing the wolf harvest season at the end of the same day the closure notice is posted; limited wolf trapping opportunities via drawing are also proposed for the Blackfoot-Clearwater, Fish Creek, and Mount Haggin WMAs; all other season structures are proposed to remain unchanged from the 2013–14 wolf season. Public comment would be taken until 5 p.m., June 23 with final adoption scheduled for July. The status quo proposal is aligned with known biology, management history and experience, livestock depredation trends, survey efforts, and public comment; consistent with wolf season objectives, other species management and continues to value wolves as an integral component of functioning ecosystems.

Action: Chairman Vermillion moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded the motion that the Commission approve for public comment the proposed 2014-15 wolf season as presented by FWP.

Chairman Vermillion, Commissioner Wolfe and Kujala had a brief discussion on the numbers stated in the 2013 Montana Wolf Hunting Season Report.

Commissioner Wolfe motioned and Commissioner Stuker seconded to amend the 2014-15 wolf harvest quota in WMU 313 from 4 to 3.

Chairman Vermillion, Commissioner Wolfe, Commissioner Tourtlotte and Kujala had a lengthy discussion on the amendment, harvest numbers, WMU 313 and SB 200.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Steve Schinlder, Montana Bow Hunters Association (MBHA), supports a more liberal season, opposes amendment.

Marc Cook, Wolves of the Rockies (WOTR), commends Commission Wolfe; supports amendment.

Steve Clevidence, Living with Wolves (LWW), agrees with Commissioner Wolfe; supports amendment.

Kylie Paul, Defenders of Wildlife (DOW), supports amendment.

Action to Amended Motion: Amended Motion Passed 3-2.
Commissioners Wolfe, Stuker and Wetsit – aye
Chairman Vermillion and Commissioner Tourtlotte – nay

Chairman Vermillion stated the motion on the table is: that the Commission approve for public comment the proposed 2014-15 wolf season as presented by FWP with the exception of adjusting WMU 313 from 4 to 3.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Steven Schindler, MBHA, overall wolf population across the state is going up.

Keith Kubista, Montana Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife (MTSFW), in support; step in the right direction but is not enough.

Marc Cooke, WOTR, disagrees with status quo.

Derek Goldman, Endangered Species Coalition (ESC), keep an eye on breeding pairs to ensure wolf restoration.

Toby Walrath, Montana Trappers Association (MTA), would like the use of traps and snares.

Steve Clevidence, LWW, snares should not be considered; would only increase the public wrath.

Chairman Vermillion stated snares are not in the proposal.

Kylie Paul, DOW, requests the Commission reject the proposal to open the WMAs to the unnecessary trapping of wolves.

Cheryl Kindsdry, Wolf Watchers (WW), need to think of ecotourism; opposes trapping.

Nick Gevok, MWF, supports the season; science shows that wolves do regulate their own numbers.

Representative Smith, FWP is doing a good job managing wolves; 100% against trapping or snaring.

Chairman Vermillion commended and thanked the Department for being proactive on the season closures and the approach in WMU 313; landowner tolerance is increasing.

Action on Motion, as Amended: Motion Passed.

17. Voluntary Wolf Management Stamp – Proposed
Quentin Kujala, Wildlife Management Section Chief explained wolf management in Montana currently includes regulated take by hunters and trappers. 87-1-623, MCA directs all wolf license revenue be deposited in a wolf management account, and funding must be used equally for collaring and control. Other stakeholders interested in contributing to wolf management but not wanting to harvest wolves or have their funds directed at only collaring or control have expressed interest in similarly contributing. While purchasing a conservation license and/or wolf license is currently available to any person, many do not believe those purchase options appropriately

reflect a non-consumptive perspective. This proposal would seek to establish Commission policy directing the Department to conduct rulemaking to define: a voluntary wolf conservation stamp or decal for any person wanting to financially contribute to wolf management and clarify how donated dollars would be allocated; address administrative costs associated with the stamp/decal, then to equally assist grants awarded through the livestock loss reduction program, wolf monitoring, habitat, research, and education/outreach and FWP enforcement staff or efforts in occupied wolf habitat. Adopting this policy would initiate efforts by the Department to conduct rulemaking; the process would include an initial and final presentation to the Commission with an opportunity for public review and comment. While it is impossible to predict participation levels, this stamp would reflect expressed public interest for a new mechanism to contribute to wolf management.

Action: Chairman Vermillion moved and Commissioner Wetsit seconded the motion that the Commission approve for public comment the proposed policy that would direct the Department to conduct rulemaking to define a voluntary wolf conservation stamp/decal and how donated funds from that stamp or decal would be allocated to specific wolf conservation efforts.

Chairman Vermillion explained his reasoning for the proposal; completely voluntary; purchasing does not buy any privileged rights. Thanked Zach Strong and the Department for their work on the wolf stamp proposal.

Commissioner Wolfe commended Chairman Vermillion for his work on this proposal; anxious to see how the public responds.

Commissioner Tourtlotte thanked Chairman Vermillion for thinking outside the box; great proposal.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Representative Smith, excellent idea.

Zach Strong, NRDC, privilege to work with Chairman Vermillion; strong support for proposal; will benefit all people involved.

Marc Cooke, WOR, step in right direction; thanked Chairman Vermillion; critical for national, local and nonconsumptive individuals to get involved.

Keith Kubista, WTSFW, what are the expectations with the donations; if revenue is needed, would it come from license dollars.

Toby Walrath, Corvallis, anything that allows for additional contribution should align with state preservation over hunting, trapping and fishing heritage; very important.

Derek Goldman, ESC, supports proposal; benefits all wildlife; thanked Strong and Chairman Vermillion for bringing this forward.

Steve Clevidence, LWW, profound step forward; supports proposal; thanked Chairman Vermillion and Strong for the work on this proposal.

Kylie Paul, DOW, supports the concept; interested in promoting this program; asks that the language in portions of the proposal be changed.

George Edwards, Livestock Loss Board (LLB), stamp would be a valued addition to the LLB to help fund programs; supports proposal.

Nick Gevok, MWF, innovated idea; very progressive; great opportunity to bring all parties together.

Director Hagener stated the Department likes the idea; need to have sufficient funding for the future and use the funding in the best interest for management.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

18. SB 200 Wolf Quota – Proposed

Quentin Kujala, Wildlife Management Section Chief explained Senate Bill 200 passed by Montana's 63rd Legislature, provides landowners or their agents, without a wolf license, to take wolves that are a potential threat to human safety, livestock or domestic dogs and for the Commission to create rules and set a quota to regulate this specific take. The Department proposes an annual statewide quota of 100 wolves; this quota and take is separate and in addition to any quota or general harvest associated with the wolf hunting and trapping season. No public comment has been solicited; during the public hearings on the rule, public comment included requests for the quota to be liberal enough to ensure legislative intent while also maintaining a viable wolf population; public comment will be taken until 5 p.m. Monday, June 23; any final adoption will take place at the July Commission meeting. Historical harvest of wolves by landowners suggests a 100-wolf statewide annual quota would maintain the opportunity to take wolves throughout the year without unduly risking Montana's wolf population; in the event harvest exceeds expectations and represents real concerns, the Commission may restrict this take in specific areas before the statewide quota is met.

Action: Commissioner Stuker moved and Commissioner Wolfe seconded the motion that the Commission approve for public comment the proposed statewide 100-wolf annual quota for wolves taken under the terms of Senate Bill 200 as presented by FWP.

Chairman Vermillion, Commissioner Wolfe, Commissioner Tourtlotte and Kujala had a lengthy discuss on the proposal.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Nick Gevok, MWF, will not get anywhere near this quota; supports proposal.

Jay Bodner, Montana Stockgrowers Association (MSGA), tentatively supports; will provide comments.

Keith Kubista, MTSFW, quota should be adequate provided it maintains separation from the other regulations; broad public outreach should be done when finalized.

Marc Cooke, WOTR, to excessive; 100 is too high; allows hunting year round; unenforceable.

Chairman Vermillion stated the Department and enforcement will have to be very vigilant.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

19. 2014 – 2015 Furbearer Season and 2014 Quotas – Proposed
Quentin Kujala, Wildlife Management Section Chief explained the furbearer season structure is defined by Commission rule every two years and quotas are set annually. FWP harvest data, field observations, and furbearer trapper input indicate the river otter are stable to increasing in Trapping District (TD) 1 and 2; annual otter reproduction appears healthy, the proportion of adult females in the adult harvest is low, and harvest quotas have been met quickly in recent years; FWP proposes to moderately increase the otter harvest quota for TD 1 from 21 to 23 and TD 2 from 20 to 25, while retaining the per trapper bag limit at two otter. Based upon new efforts at population reconstructing using real harvest information, FWP proposes to reduce the 2014 bobcat quota from 300 to 250 in TD 5. Other proposed changes include expanding trapping opportunity to the Fish Creek WMA; adjusting the deadline to apply for WMA trapping opportunities from September 30 to September 15; clarifying an open road on public land in setback definitions as having any type of motorized use at any time of year; reducing the required reporting period for incidental capture of dogs from 48 to 24 hours; requiring trappers to be able to identify bobcat skulls with the corresponding pelts during pelt inspection; and for consistency, adjust the start time for chasing bobcats in areas where the lion season has closed from two hours before sunrise to the more standard ½ hour before sunrise. Proposals provide sound furbearer management to include trapping with consideration of comments and concerns from other user groups. The public comment period will run through 5 p.m., Monday, June 23, with final adoptions at the July Commission meeting.

Action: Commissioner Stuker moved and Chairman Vermillion seconded the motion that the Commission approve for public comment the proposed 2014 and 2015 furbearer seasons and 2014 quotas.

Chairman Vermillion, Commissioner Wolfe and Kujala had a lengthy discussion on incidental take.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Toby Walrath, MTA, supports proposal; dog captures have decreased; encourages the Commission to continue improving public outreach and enforcement issues.

Marc Cooke, WOR, does not support trapping or snares; what is FWP doing to ensure trapped pets are reported; the tradition of trapping is dying.

Keith Kubista, MTSFW, support opportunities for trapping on WMAs; always a need for further public outreach.

Chairman Vermillion commended Walrath for taking the time to conduct the outreach on behalf the trapping enthusiasts.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

20. 2014 Upland Bird Quotas and Limits – Proposed
Quentin Kujala, Wildlife Management Section Chief explained upland game bird season dates for 2014 were approved in February. Adaptive Harvest Management (AHM) for sage grouse annually assesses populations and bag limits. AHM within the final Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse recommends a conservative 2-bird bag limit if average lek counts are below the long-term average of about 30 males/lek on nearly 90 pre-selected leks. If the average count exceeds the Long Term Average (LTA), then AHM recommends a standard 4-bird bag limit. The sage grouse plan prescribes a season closure based on average lek counts at least 45% below LTA over 3-years. Heightened public awareness of sage grouse, and potential habitat impacts from energy development, resulted in the Commission adopting a conservative 2-bird bag limit in 2007, a year of above-average lek counts (33.6 males/lek). The 2-bird bag limit was maintained from 2008-12 with annual survey averages of 22.9, 23.3, 20.5, 19.2 and 19.1 males/lek or 24-34% below LTA. Continuing the downward trend from the recent high in 2009 (23.3), the 2013 lek average was 14.9 males/lek, 48% below the LTA. In

response to population concerns and the potential for listing, the conservative 2-bird bag limit was maintained in 2013 and the Commission adopted 3 distinct management zones for sage grouse in February. These zones allow for management at a scale finer than statewide. Final 2014 lek counts were not available for the May Commission meeting, preliminary indications suggest no improvement and potentially additional decline across all 3 management zones. With the downward trend in lek counts expected to continue with a second consecutive year at or below 45% below the LTA, FWP proposes to close the sage grouse season in 2014. Future lek counts above the 45% closure criteria but below the LTA for 3 consecutive years would prompt a proposal to reopen the season as would a single year with lek counts above the LTA. Based on the upland bird bag and possession limits as supported by biology and management history, no other changes are proposed for other upland game bird bag, possession limits and permit quotas; this includes fall turkey permits. If approved, public comment on the proposal will run through 5 p.m., Monday, June 23. This proposal is based upon field observations and is consistent with the Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage Grouse in Montana and guide any proposal to re-open the season; population status and species biology don't support changes for other species at this time. FWP recommends adopting the proposed sage grouse closure and maintaining 2013 bag and possession limits and permit quotas for all other upland game birds, consistent with known biology, management history and survey efforts to date; season dates were previously set by the Commission in February 2014.

Action: Commissioner Wolfe moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded the motion that the Commission approve for public comment the proposed 2014 upland game bird bag and possession limits and permit quotas as presented by FWP with the exception of the sage grouse season.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

Action: Commissioner Stuker moved and Commissioner Wolfe seconded the motion that the Commission approve for public comment the proposed 2014 sage grouse season closure, bag and possession limits and permit quotas as presented by FWP.

Chairman Vermillion, Commissioner Stuker and Commissioner Wolfe had a lengthy discussion on the proposed 2014 sage grouse season closure, season restrictions, management plan and conservation strategies.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Ben Deeble, Big Sky Upland Bird Association (BSUBA), lacks a complete analysis of sage grouse populations across Montana; doesn't agree with proposal; consider strategic shutdowns.

Chairman Vermillion and Deeble had a conversation on lek counts and numbers.

Dan Bailey, Pheasants Forever (PF), supports science base management, not political or legal reasons; would like to have some sort of hunting season for sportsman.

Greg Munther, Montana Backcountry Hunters and Anglers (MTBHA), reduce season and bag limits; against proposal.

Jay Gore, Sage Grouse Council Member, asked to defer decision until after the June 9 Upland Game Bird Advisory Committee's meeting; invited the Department to attend with finalized numbers.

Nick Gevok, MWF, does not want to see closure without data; will not support until data is received.

Jay Bodner, MGSA, appropriate matter to consider at this point; appreciates Department for looking into this issue.

John Borgreen, Russell Country Sportsmen's Association (RCSA), follow the established process; urges caution with decision; will be viewed as a critical eye by sportsman.

Glenn Hockett, Gallatin Wildlife Federation (GWF), would like to see data; what are the recommendations to protecting habitat; concerned with habitat loss and depredation; submitted proposal to FWP regarding a potential idea for sage grouse hunting; issue individual tags.

Jim Bailey, GWF, most serious risk of the proposal is the degree of which way it may divert attention publicly and professionally from habitat.

Blair Anderson, Montana Falconers Association (MFA); last year was terrible in all aspects; wants data; consider shortening the length of the season.

Commissioner Tourtlotte stated there are lot of good comments; does not support.

Commissioner Tourtlotte moved and Commissioner Wetsit seconded to amend the motion that the Commission table the vote on the sage grouse season closure until after the June 9 Upland Game Bird Advisory Council's meeting.

Chairman Vermillion stated this is a tentative proposal; if tabled, the public comment will not take place; comfortable with the Department coming to the Commission in July with data before the final decision is made.

Director Hagener stated delay would cause problems with timing issues; special Commission meetings would need to take place.

Commissioner Stuker agrees with Vermillion; need to move forward; should be put out for public comment.

Kujala stated there would be a timeline problem; will work with the Upland Game Bird Council at the June 9 meeting.

Action on amended motion: Motion fails 4 to 1.
Commissioner Tourtlotte - aye
Chairman Vermillion, Commissioner's Wolfe, Stuker and Wetsit – nay

Zack Zipfel, FWP Attorney, stated for the sake of clarity a new motion should be made.

Chairman Vermillion moved and Commissioner Tourtlotte seconded to rescind the original motion to close the sage grouse season. Motion passed.

Chairman Vermillion moved and Commissioner Wolfe seconded that the Commission approve for public comment the 2014 sage grouse season alternatives to include complete closure as suggested by the Department or status quo from 2013 to include additional discussion on regional closures, regional openings, shorter seasons and decreased bag limits as options available to the Department and the Commission for sage grouse management in 2014.

Chairman Vermillion, Commissioner Stuker and Kujala had a short conversation on sage grouse tags.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

21. Nongame Tax Check-off Work Plan – Proposed
Quentin Kujala, Wildlife Management Section Chief explained under MCA provisions, the Commission shall review and annually approve the nongame wildlife program's projects recommended by the Department for funding from the nongame wildlife account. The average received by FWP from the 2004-2012 tax years was $27,000/year; as of March 31, 2014, $19,500 had been donated for tax year 2013, which is average for this time of year. Public comment will be solicited upon approval. FWP is proposing the following work in FY15 with this anticipated funding in addition to some balance in the fund from previous years:

$30,000 Inventory, monitoring and conservation work on Montana Species of Concern and species in need of inventory as determined through a formal ranking process.
$10,000 Prioritize habitat for conservation including: 1) identifying the most critical habitat needs for nongame, threatened or endangered species, 2) identifying and monitoring threats to these critical habitats.
$5,000 Competitive student stipend for nongame research.
$3,000 Contribution to ongoing Sylvatic Plague Vaccine research in Montana for black-footed ferret recovery.
$2,000 Education and outreach efforts to promote nongame wildlife appreciation and conservation.

Action: Commissioner Stuker moved and Commissioner Wetsit seconded the motion that the Commission tentatively approve the proposed Nongame Tax Check-Off work for Fiscal Year 2015.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

22. HB 454 Access Agreements – Proposed
Quentin Kujala, Wildlife Management Section Chief explained FWP is proposing two new Hunting Access Agreements (HAA) on the Gillett Ranch and Swanz Ranch under House Bill 454 and provisions of 87-2-513 MCA. The Department requests the Commission grant authority to FWP to issue the following either-sex elk permits for use only on land enrolled in:

The Gillett Ranch Public Elk HAA: one 410-22 either-sex elk permit to Glen Gillett or designated family member; and four 410-22 either-sex elk permits to hunters randomly selected from the list of unsuccessful applicants for 410-20 either-sex elk permits. Approximately 1,040 acres of private land will be enrolled in HD 410. The four hunters who receive 410-22 permits valid only on this enrolled land may hunt for either-sex elk on any day they call and request permission and one to two hunters per day who possess a valid license will be allowed to hunt for antlerless elk. There will be no restrictions on the number of days that Mr. Gillett can hunt the enrolled property. Walk-in only access will be permitted on the enrolled property; successful hunters who do not wish to pack out their elk may contact Mr. Gillett for assistance in retrieval. Public comment will run through 5 p.m., Monday June 23, with final action at the July

Commission meeting. If approved, this agreement provides for additional elk hunting opportunity on HD 410, and if the agreement is not approved, the landowner may choose to prohibit public hunting or lease the property to an outfitter.

The Swanz HAA specifically states that in return for allowing access to elk hunters, Mr. Swanz, or a family member, would receive one 411-21 either-sex permit and FWP would issue four additional 411-21 permits from the already randomized list of unsuccessful applicants for that license permit type (LPT); successful applicants could only hunt on the Swanz deeded property. This agreement was first used in 2002 and has been reapplied annually since then based upon continued positive post-hunt evaluations. The proposed agreement for 2014 represents no change from the 2013 agreement. The Swanz agreement has received public review in previous years via the Commission's hunting season setting process; to date, that review has generated relatively few public comments. The post-hunt evaluations have sought feedback from all identified hunters and the landowner; the evaluations confirm that agreement terms, and reasonable expectations are generally being met. The public comment period for any adopted proposal will run through 5 p.m., Monday, June 23, with final action at the July Commission meeting. Failure to approve this agreement may result in reduced public elk hunting access in this area.

Action: Commissioner Stuker moved and Commissioner Wetsit seconded the motion that the Commission approve for public comment the proposed Gillett Ranch and Swanz Ranch hunting access agreement as presented by FWP.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Commissioner Wolfe asked where the one to two hunters per day language came from.

Kujala stated the language is stated in the long standing access agreements.

Chairman Vermillion thanked both families for participating.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

23. Avista Cooperative Management Area – Proposed

Quentin Kujala, Wildlife Management Section Chief explained this proposal would establish for two years, through Commission rule, a Cooperative Management Area (CMA) on Avista Corporation property in Sanders County; the rules are currently covered under a special circumstances agreement through Block Management (BM) and have been in effect for almost seven years. The BM program is a hunting access program and there is a need for a Commission rule to ensure recreational use rules can be enforced during times when no hunting seasons are in effect. Avista does not accept any monetary payment through BM; Avista asks FWP to enforce these regulations on their property; this is a recreational area heavily used by the public along the Clark Fork River near Thompson Falls. The CMA rules would provide for managed public access for camping, fishing, hunting, boating and other outdoor activities during parts of the year that fall outside of the general fall hunting season; several other Avista properties would still remain in the BM program for hunting; the rules are not new to Avista and have been previously covered under BM. Public process will be initiated if the proposal is approved. Without adoption of this proposal, FWP would continue to operate under a special circumstances agreement and enforcement efforts could be hampered if violators cannot be prosecuted outside of hunting season, potentially resulting in decreased access on Avista lands in Sanders County.

Action: Commissioner Wolfe moved and Commissioner Stuker seconded the motion that the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the proposed Avista Cooperative Management Area Biennial Rule.

Chairman Vermillion asked for public comment.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

24. Robb Ledford Grazing Lease – Final

Quentin Kujala, Wildlife Management Section Chief explained a six-year grazing lease renewal is proposed with the Ledford Creek Grazing Association (LCGA) on the Robb/Ledford WMA. The lease involves grazing up to 2,955 cattle Animal Unit Months (AUM) annually on 32,368 acres of the Robb/Ledford Coordinated Grazing System. The system includes 17,302 acres of FWP deeded, 10,786 acres of DNRC leased by FWP, 3,600 acres of DNRC leased by the LCGA, and 680 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) leased by the LCGA. Since 2000, FWP used grazing leases with the LCGA to help meet the following management plan objectives: maintenance or improvement of basic resources including vegetation, soil, and water; expanding benefits of FWP management to adjacent DNRC, BLM, and US Forest Service (USFS) lands; showcase the WMA as an area where wildlife and livestock co-exist while maintaining healthy rangelands; provide winter forage for elk; provide habitat for all wildlife using the WMA; incorporate adjacent public lands into WMA management; provide adequate public access; maintain the natural character of the land; and increase public awareness and appreciation for the diversity of wildlife on the WMA. A draft EA was completed and released for public comment March 19-April 25.

Alternative A: Continue the current grazing system lease with LCGA at the standard grazing rate. The grazing system would run from June 22-October 15, with a maximum of 2,955 AUMs. FWP would assume all fence and waterline maintenance and repair responsibilities.

Alternative B: Continue the current system but the lease to LCGA would be for the lower DNRC rate and LCGA would assume all fence and waterline maintenance and repair responsibilities.
Alternative C: Discontinue the grazing lease and halt all grazing on the WMA.

Benefits of Alternatives A and B include maintaining productive elk winter range forage, increased tolerance of elk from area livestock producers, reduction of private lands/elk conflicts, and continued collaborative land management efforts involving FWP, DNRC, BLM, USFS, and livestock producers. Alternative C would lose the landscape benefits of the grazing arrangement and would abandon the considerable investment in this system, but this alternative would likely result in a reduction in site specific grazing impacts. Deteriorated riparian impacts have been noted in the Rock/Swamp Creek area, but it is unclear whether the grazing lease is linked to these impacts.

Chairman Vermillion, Kujala and Zipfel discussed the proper way to make a motion on the proposal.

Action: Commissioner Vermillion moved and Commissioner Wetsit seconded the motion that the Commission approve a six-year lease under alternative B except that at the end of year 2016, the Department will come to the Commission with a report on the riparian condition in Rock Creek and Swamp Creek, and if the improvement in the range is not where the Department feels it needs to be, then an amendment be added to the lease to reflect a alteration of the rotation system to accommodate or to improve the condition of Rock Creek and Swamp Creek for the final three years of the lease.

Chairman Vermillion, Commissioner Stuker, Commissioner Wolfe and Kujala had a lengthy discussion on grazing leases and the proposed motion.

Neil Barnosky, Sheridan, ranch is a member of the LCGA, the relationship between FWP, sportsmen and landowner are very important piece of the overall function of wildlife and land management; ranchers depend on long term ranching; supports six-year lease.

Ed Malesich, Dillon, permittee on the LCGA, great partnership with the ranching and recreational community; supports proposal.

Glenn Hockett, GWF, there is an ongoing problem with Rock Creek and Swamp Creek pasture; would like to be involved in all Region 3 WMAs; everyone needs to work together; opposes proposed motion.

Jim Bailey, GWF, cautions focusing on riparian areas, neglecting bigger issues; lease is not justified; WMAs are public trust resources; opposes proposal.

Jay Bodner, MTSGA, supports proposal; the Department and permittee have shown a willingness to collaborate together to make a system that works positively.

Nick Gevok, MWF, supports proposal; would like to see changes to improve habitat.

Chairman Vermillion explained his view on the proposal; moving in the right direction; asked the Department to make sure GWF is more involved.

Action on Motion: Motion Passed.

25. Request for Sage Grouse from Alberta - Informational
Joel Nicholson, Senior Species at Risk Biologist of Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development provided an updated on translocation project results and conveyed thanks for cooperation with the translocation; outlined significant conservation actions that are occurring on the southeast Alberta landscape, many as a result of the translocation; Alberta would like an additional translocation in the spring of 2015.

26. Public Comment – For Issues Not On This Agenda
Representative Bridget Smith stated she recommends the buffalo on Turner's ranch go to the Fort Peck Indian Reservation.

Chairman Vermillion thanked Region 6 Manager Tom Flowers and staff for hosting the Commission meeting.

Action: Commissioner Stuker moved and Commissioner Wolfe seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting. Motion Carried.

The meeting adjourned at 3:55 p.m.

Dan Vermillion, Chairman

M. Jeff Hagener, Director