

# **R-7 CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL**

## **Meeting Notes**

### **September 12, 2007**

**Attendance:** Greg Mohr, Julie Jordan, Rob Reukauf, Jim Schaefer, Mark Forman, Art Hayes III, Windy Davis, Bryce Christensen, Erin O'Connor, Dwayne Andrews, John Ensign, Captain Mike Moore, Jack Austin

**Absent:** Mary Zeiss Stange, Warren Broeder, Todd Steadman, Chris Pileski, John Wilkinson, Larry Woolston, John Little, Ginger Omland, Brad Schmitz

**Guest Speakers:** Carolyn Sime-FWP statewide Wolf Coordinator and Quentin Kujala-FWP statewide big game bureau chief

**Introduction:** Bryce introduced himself and welcomed guests. He briefly discussed wolf sightings and depredation in the area. He then introduced Carolyn Sime and Quentin Kujala.

#### **Moving From Paper to Practice: Developing Public Harvest Strategies for Gray Wolves in Montana**

Carolyn Sime introduced herself and summarized what they are hoping to be able to communicate to members and public at the meetings they have been attending. Her main goal is to orient people on hunting, trapping and delisting wolves. Wolves need to be managed like other wildlife. We are at early stages of thinking of how people will go about hunting and trapping wolves.

#### **History of Wolves:**

Wolves were nearly gone by mid 1930's, were listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1974, and were deemed biologically recovered in 2002.

The possibility of having large carnivores such as bears, lions and wolves in Montana is made possible through restored prey populations, the North American Model, and the ESA. These species are sustained here through such things as social tolerance, habitat availability, and management tools like public harvest.

#### **Wolf Recovery:**

Wolves were reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park (YNP) & central Idaho in 1995-96. Recolonization from Canada into NW Montana occurred in the late 70's. We are currently transitioning from federal wolf recovery to state conservation and management. Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming need to have approved management plans and state laws that ensure maintenance of a recovered population prior to delisting. Each state needs to maintain a minimum of 10 breeding pairs and have a population that is viable and self-sustaining.

**Timeline:**

Montana started planning for delisting in 2000. Montana, Idaho and Wyoming had enough wolves by 2002. Montana and Idaho's plans were approved in 2004. Montana started receiving federal funding in 2004. Right now we receive \$300,000 from Congress and \$300,000 from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

**Foundation of the Plan and What We're Doing:**

Wolves are a native species that need to find their place on the landscape just like other species. We treat and manage them like other wildlife.

Some of the things that we need to be sure we're doing are addressing human safety, balancing predator and prey and incorporating public hunting and trapping.

As far as the state program goes, a lot of time is spent monitoring wolves.

**Wolf Monitoring:**

People can report tracks, sighting, scat, etc. through a link on the FWP website. This information goes directly to Carolyn and then to the field. Information can also be reported on postcards available at license agents, land management offices or headquarters.

All of the information reported goes into a databank and is managed with other related reports for possible connections.

Flying is done once or twice a month to try to get visuals of wolves and get a count of individuals and packs.

We also try to get a count of breeding pairs (adult male and female and two pups by December 31). There needs to be 30 breeding pairs in the Northern Rockies region that includes Montana, Idaho and Wyoming.

The gray wolf population as of December 31, 2006, was 316 (21 breeding pairs).

The increase of wolves into Montana started in 1999-2000 from Idaho and YNP.

**Q:** Bryce asked if YNP actually reached a peak and then declined. Weren't some of the animals in the estimate dispersals?

Carolyn said not exactly. Idaho is a bigger source of wolves for NW Montana than YNP. Wolves in YNP that are dispersing have four main places to go: Montana, Idaho and Wyoming and the spots in between. The most increase has been along the Idaho/Montana border (Regions 1 & 2).

**Q:** Rob asked why the wolves don't stay in YNP and eat buffalo.

Carolyn replied that some wolf packs are learning how to kill buffalo and have been starting to more and more. It is a learned behavior.

### **Misc. Wolf Information and Where They Live:**

Half to a third of Montana packs qualify as breeding pairs. Carolyn then showed a map of where wolves have been reported and they were able to verify that there was a pack there through their fieldwork. Currently the north half of the state is considered the “endangered area” while the south half of the state is considered an “experimental area.” Upon delisting, that separation goes away. In 2006, half of the wolf population was in the experimental area and the other half was in the endangered area.

Wolves are very mobile and can travel 20-30 miles a day. Wolves are not administered as “predators;” they are “species in need of management.” The average pack size is 5.8 wolves. Their average home range is 200 square miles with 30% of their territory being private land. An average litter size is 4.5 wolves.

Their primary prey is white-tailed deer in NW Montana and elk in the west and SW part of the state. They have also seen mule deer to a lesser extent and even some antelope as prey as well.

The annual survival rate based on collared animals is about 70-75%. Most mortality is related to resolving wolf/livestock conflicts. They documented 64 dead wolves last year of which 53 were removed to address livestock conflicts.

Approximately 50% of the Montana packs qualify as breeding pairs.

From the Montana Plan, we have this concept called adaptive management where we have a very high degree of flexibility based on the status of the population. Fifteen breeding pairs allow us to have greater flexibility in our management. We have to have a minimum of 10 pairs to keep us off the endangered species list.

### **Public Participation:**

**Q:** A representative of the public questioned the tattooing and registration process of captive and hybrid wolves and FWP’s involvement in this process.

Carolyn responded that that statute and tattooing is a voluntary compliance. The public representative asked if there is a chance FWP will work on this, to which Carolyn replied yes.

**Q:** Rob asked if FWP follows up on the tattooed wolves. Carolyn said we tried a few years ago with limited success.

Rob said that not knowing whether an animal that livestock owners may see is an endangered wolf or a hybrid puts them in a bad position that they did not ask to be put in.

Captain Moore talked about tattooing from an Enforcement perspective. There is not a lot of compliance with tattooing.

**Q:** A representative of the public asked how the “domestic wolf” killed near Jordan was compared to YNP wolves.

Carolyn answered that there is enough common genes in history that the best we can do is say somewhere on the gradient between dog and wolf. We take blood samples from every wolf killed to use in a “library” of all samples. One library is in Oregon while the other is at UCLA. The lab said this wolf has DNA from Alaska and the Midwest, not the Northern Rockies. The DNA combination is impossible without human intervention.

**Q:** A representative of the public asked if a hybrid mated with a wolf from YNP, couldn't this particular animal have come from the park? Are these labs owned by Defenders of Wildlife?

Carolyn responded that hybrids could mate back in. One lab is a USFWS Enforcement lab and other is owned by UCLA.

**Q:** The public representative asked if there could be a hybrid wolf in the YNP packs.

Carolyn replied that it is biologically possible but not likely because wild wolves would most likely kill a hybrid or captive wolf.

**Q:** A representative of the public asked if domestic wolves are property of FWP. If yes, why isn't FWP paying damages? If no, why is FWP regulating who can kill the “dogs” in Garfield County?

Carolyn stated that we don't know if the “dogs” killing sheep in Garfield County are property of the public and managed by FWP. When FWP gets to the point that it determines if it is a wild wolf, it is the property of the public managed by FWP. If the animal turns out to be domestic, then it's the property of the owner. State of Montana is in the process of developing a compensation program. The Board of Livestock is also making recommendations.

**Q:** A representative of the public said FWP is anticipating  $\frac{3}{4}$  million-dollar revenue from a wolf-hunting season. Is that going to go towards compensation?

Carolyn responded that revenue goes back into the agency's budget.

**Q:** A representative of the public asked who pays Wildlife Services (WS) for problem wolves? Garfield County contracts with WS and pays them \$53,000 a year. They didn't know they were supposed to have to do that.

Carolyn replied that WS is our federal agency partner according to the Montana Plan. The Montana appropriation for wolf study is shared with Idaho and Wyoming.

**Q:** A representative of the public asked if there is a possibility of funding due to the 95% chance we're dealing with hybrids. Can FWP help loosen up kill permits and aid to address the problems?

Carolyn stated that the 45-day kill permits are mandated by the feds; we can't do anything about that. We rely on WS to determine if an animal is dog/wolf/hybrid. WS are the experts in the field on this issue.

**Q:** A representative of the public asked for slack so that anyone can kill an animal and bring it to FWP without penalty based on the fact that there is less than a 5% chance that it's a purebred wolf.

Carolyn did not agree with that because we honestly do not know what the animal is at this point. This puts FWP over a barrel so to speak.

Bryce then said FWP is painted in a box on this. It is ultimately up to WS. He was not certain what the amount of funding from FWP currently is. Carolyn said that is for coyote work.

Captain Moore said it is very prudent to get the animal recently caught in the snare tested ASAP and that it should be interesting to see what DNA this matches up with. The other two animals seen in Jordan could be related. We need to determine if someone is letting these animals go and verify that these are not part of our recovery program.

**Q:** A representative of the public asked what problems we would encounter if the Jordan animals were determined to be purebred wolves. Would they have to change everything to live as ranchers?

Carolyn replied that if the current dead animal is a wild wolf, it was an incidental take. The snare that it was caught in had a stop on it that failed, which is what killed the animal. At that point things would change if wild wolf activity is confirmed. Changes would have to occur as far as traps and snares are concerned. Everything changes for WS as well then. If not wild, then FWP needs to determine who is letting these animals loose.

**Q:** Greg asked if there is a possibility that there is a breeding pair of hybrids.

Carolyn stated that it's possible that a wolf from YNP found captive hybrids and mated.

**Q:** Bryce asked if Defenders is responsible for making a decision of payment if it is a wild wolf.

Carolyn replied yes, as long as it is damage caused by wild wolves that is confirmed by WS. If it is a captive wolf, Defenders denies claims for compensation.

**Q:** A representative of the public asked what the CMR's direction is going to be if WS identifies these as wild wolves. What would the affect be on Garfield County?

Carolyn responded that WS said they did not need room to work on the refuge after receiving notification of the 2006 depredation events. WS has not said they need access to the refuge at this point but the manager has indicated that they are willing to work with FWP again. If these animals were determined to be wild wolves, that is a good question for the refuge. The Montana Plan says if wild wolves get here on their own, they can be here just like other native species. However, if there are conflicts with livestock, we work through those with hunting, lethal control, trapping, etc. She said one thing to keep in mind is that there are a lot of elk on CMR and wolves have a way of finding prey bases like that. There is no real competition with other wild wolves here yet.

**Comment:** A representative of the public said he thought wolves were only in YNP and didn't know FWP had a management plan for wolves. Private landowners should not have to change their management practices. This is a private property issue.

Carolyn then said that YNP was the actual reintroduction site but there was never a premise that they would stay in the park.

**Comment:** Mark said he recently visited with a WS trapper from Jordan. A North Dakota WS trapper told the Montana WS trapper that there is an influx of Minnesota wolves coming west across North Dakota and that they are starting to see some around Dickinson, North Dakota.

Carolyn had not heard that and said that if the Minnesota wolves mixed here, they would be managed all the same.

**Q:** A representative of the public asked how many years it will be until we have a hunting and trapping season. How many do we want removed from what parts of the state? Will there be permits available in eastern Montana?

Carolyn said that they expect so and that Quentin would be addressing this in his part of the presentation. We do not have a season in mind yet but are early in that conversation and expect one eventually. It really depends on delisting. We are working towards being ready to go as soon as delisting takes place. If our federal counterparts keep up their delisting timeline, it could be possible as soon as fall of 2008.

**Q:** Greg asked if violations or legal issues that occur today are under Montana law or federal law?

Carolyn responded that while wolves are still listed right now, it is Federal, but if delisting occurs it becomes State (FWP).

**Comment:** Julie voiced her frustrations with the state spending money on wolves instead of elderly, nursing homes, meth addicts, etc.

*(Continuation of Program Presentations—Quentin Kujala)*

- The fact that wolves are considered a “species in need of management” affords the FWP Commission some management flexibility.
- Montana’s breeding pair benchmark is 15. If we fall below that we lose some management tools.
- Things that we can utilize for monitoring wolves are collaring and tracking and hunter harvest surveys.
- Another management consideration is wolf relationships to ungulates and other species that have been hunted for a long time.

**Timing of Harvest**

Things to consider when we work to determine a harvest season are:

- a need to maintain breeding potential (season is late January into February)
- prime pelt condition (late fall, early winter)
- ongoing seasons and public presence
- relationship to annual count (Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>)
- is there a time of year relative to livestock depredation?

**Opportunity & Harvest Allocation**

- How do we distribute opportunities for harvest across those that are interested? Some groups that we need to think about and components of each are hunters and trappers, resident and nonresident, non-outfitted and outfitted, etc.
- We also need to consider other factors such as maximum harvest opportunity, limited harvest, and license prices.
- There is lot of different opinions coming to the focus as we deal with these issues.
- We will continue to deal with those who have and will continue to challenge the delisting process.

**Q:** Mark asked where the proposed \$19 license fee came from?

Quentin replied that that came from other licenses such as resident black bear tags. It was a dollar amount that had a precedent set already with other license types. License prices are legislatively set. The license price is an issue that is not open for debate with the FWP Commission.

**Harvest Monitoring**

- The state has a history of quota tracking with things such as lions and furbearers.

- The last legislative session formally recognized the web as a public posting site. Closures could come quickly.
- Harvest methods, management units and rates of harvest are other important factors that need to be considered.

Quentin stated that a lot of the wolf presence in NW Montana is from the population from Idaho. This raised the question of how we need to be cognizant of what other states are doing.

### **Process to Enumerate and Pass a Season At This Time**

**August-September:** FWP introduces process to CAC and others

**September:** Commission work session (public input welcome). This is where information from CAC meetings will be presented and is a non-decision making meeting.

**October-November:** Informal discussions, opportunity to take discussion to other folks

**December:** Proposal(s) introduced with public comment; Tentative adopted by FWP Commission

**January:** Public comment at meetings across state, directed to adopted Tentatives

**February:** Public comment if any changes to Tentative; Final adopted by Commission

**Spring 2008:** Harvest quotas proposed and adopted by Commission through established Tentative/Final process

**Q:** A representative of the public asked Quentin if he expects legal challenges from pro-wolf people as far as delisting wolves goes.

Carolyn and Quentin responded that they do expect opposition to the decision to delist wolves. Most federal agencies, attorney general, and other related groups have indicated that they will support delisting. However, there is always the potential that state decisions to hunt or trap wolves could be challenged as well. The delisting decision though is in the Federal court system.

**Q:** Captain Moore asked if it is possible to lose delisting status due to budget and monetary problems.

Carolyn said FWP is continuing to press the case that if wolf recovery is a national priority, the nation can help pay for long-term management. Given the status of the federal budget, it remains to be seen how far down the road that argument will go. Another idea is that there is a federal requirement for post-delisting monitoring. For a minimum of five years after delisting there will be oversight by the feds. She does not expect any problems or issues with that. The five-year delisting is part of the ESA. Another idea they have is a trust fund that is a Congressional set-aside where interest goes toward long-term management. Once we start hunting and trapping there will be a stream of revenue from license sales. There is also a provision in the statute for an auction of a wolf license that would go back into the budget exclusively for wolves.

**Q:** Dwayne asked what FWP's perspective is on where are we headed on a compensation program.

Carolyn replied that the Montana Wolf Plan was clear on saying they thought there should be a Montana-based program. License fees would not be used for reimbursement. The 2007 legislature put a lot of the product of the working group into statute.

**Q:** Dwayne asked if there has there been direction toward identifying a funding source?

Carolyn said that the working group identified private funds and any special appropriations that the legislature saw fit.

**Q:** Dwayne asked who determined that license fees would not be used for compensation?

Carolyn replied that that detail was not captured in the statute.

**Q:** Dwayne asked why we are satisfied with the \$19 license fee. Why not more and split part of the funds for compensation? People would probably be willing to pay more to hunt wolves because it's a unique opportunity.

Quentin provided some information on what quota numbers would be in NW Montana as well as eastern Montana if that were articulated management units in those areas. The answers to quota questions come from interaction with wildlife co-op units and through wolf biology.

### **Open Discussion:**

**Q:** Bryce asked if mid-west states hunt and trap to which Quentin replied no.

Carolyn said that Minnesota plan has a five-year moratorium. Wisconsin and Michigan are not really talking about it and there is no official moratorium in their plans. They are a little gun-shy about public discussion and have a perception that Montana is in a hurry.

**Q:** A representative of the public asked if Montana, Idaho and Wyoming are working together on hunting possibilities.

Carolyn replied yes, Idaho has had a special working group and is on a similar path as we are. Wyoming is working on getting a plan approved through their commission and legislature.

**Q:** A representative of the public asked if North Dakota is working on a plan if they are expecting influx from Minnesota.

Carolyn said wolves would still be listed as endangered in North Dakota. The delisting decision in the Northern Rockies would not cover the Dakotas.

**Comment:** Jim stated he would like to see more licenses in eastern Montana than western Montana to bring more people to this part of the state for improved tourism.

**Comment:** Rob stated he thinks there is going to be litigation for a long time so the wolf population will keep getting bigger before there is any decision on delisting. When game populations decrease and consequently hunters decrease, FWP will be getting less license dollars. He thinks the problem is going to get out of hand before anything gets done.

**Comment:** Greg said it appears there are 232 wolves unaccounted for or unidentified as breeding pairs. If the state personnel counted wolves, where were the feds? They seem to have dropped the ball. He agrees with Rob that we will see challenges from people who want to see wolves. There is a potential to quadruple as far as numbers of wolves go. He thinks we should have been working on this a year ago. He commended Carolyn and Quentin for being leaders of the pack on this issue.

**Comment:** Art would like to see area landowners be told if there is a sighting in their area.

**Comment:** Bryce said that people need to notify FWP when sightings occur before they tell their neighbors. Generally, the community knows of sightings far in advance of FWP.

**Comment:** Jim thinks there are a lot of factors that play into the process. If Administration changes, that could cause hold-ups. The issue is going to be on-going before a decision is made.

**Comment:** Mark agrees that delisting by next spring is not locked in. He has hopes that it will eventually happen and thinks it's good that there is a plan in place. He thinks that producers need to be given a little more slack, and it is the landowners right to try to protect their property.

**Comment:** Julie agrees with the previous statements. She thinks we don't hear about livestock killings in western Montana as much because there are fewer livestock in that part of the state.

Carolyn agreed saying that the northwest counties have some of the lowest densities of cattle and sheep in the state. She also said ironically some of the highest densities are the ones right behind YNP, such as Beaverhead, and also in this part of the state.

### **Additional Issues**

At this point, Bryce thanks Quentin and Carolyn for their presentation and asked the members if there were any additional items they would like to discuss.

**Comment:** Greg gave a brief report of the Fort Peck Hatchery funding meeting that he attended. Walleyes Unlimited was heavily represented, as well as one representative from Trout Unlimited. Another meeting is scheduled Sept. 24<sup>th</sup> in Lewistown to try to

get more CAC members from the west to attend. Greg cannot go but if anyone else would like to attend, he urged them to do so. The Fort Peck and Miles City hatcheries are two of the most expensive hatcheries to run. The group toured Ft. Peck Hatchery, which Greg said is only fully functioning two months out of the year during walleye work. The electric bill at that hatchery is \$80,000. Greg said federal money is out there but is being used for Hurricane Katrina work at this time. A lot of ideas for different funding sources were presented.

Captain Moore asked what the fear is on raising license prices to fund these hatcheries.

Greg said when the Ft. Peck hatchery was built, the main catalysts for it was the walleye fishermen wanting a warm water hatchery to get walleye projects going. He stated that politics played a role. The hatchery was supposed to be a warm water fish hatchery and is over-built according to the original plans. The building also has the ability to raise cold- water fish, so the walleye fishermen felt like they had been betrayed. Having a cold-water fisheries stamp and a warm water fish stamp separate was discussed at the funding meeting. Greg said it was sad to see the hatchery sitting mostly idle. He stated that Regions 5, 6 and 7 were represented and Region 7 agrees a lot with Region 5.

Bryce encouraged any other members to represent us at the meeting in Lewistown.

Bryce asked for any news from other counties.

Rob has been talking with Brad about the possibility of a FAS near Terry. He reports that they are experiencing difficulties with family members involved.

Greg said the Sidney area is experiencing problems with low water in the river. He asked if there are signs posted at access sites to warn people about driving vehicles below the high water mark.

Captain Moore responded that there is at some places.

Bryce said that there is a state law against it but there are problems with low water at a lot of places as far as FWP employees are concerned, so we don't want to push the issue. He said we have problems right here in town with people riding and driving along the Tongue River.

Captain Moore said that there are signs at Black Bridge. Generally, Enforcement doesn't get too involved unless damage is being done.

Bryce would like for Captain Moore to talk to John Little about this.

Jim reported that the Custer Country Visitors Guide is soon making available a bird watching trail brochure for SE Montana, which involves a lot of FAS and parks in the area. They have gotten good participation with Terri Walters from Region 5 and John Little in Region 7. He appreciates their time and effort in helping them with this project.

The guide will be available next week. If anyone knows of locations for distribution let him know and he will do that.

At this point, Bryce asked for ideas for the next meeting to be held sometime in December or January. The focus of attention at this meeting will probably go back towards access.

Rob said that he has heard there was a 17% decrease in license sales for the state last year, to which Bryce, Dwayne and Captain Moore said they had not heard that. Jim said he heard there were fewer hunters but had not heard of fewer licenses sold. Bryce said he would check into that. Dwayne found some information indicating that the total number of hunting licenses sold in 2006 was 17% less than sold in 2005 nationwide. Dwayne researched Montana license sales and found that 2006 license sales were higher than 2005 but only slightly so. The 17% reduction is a nationwide figure and not applicable to Montana.

Greg said he is often asked why there is no boating access between Intake and Glendive. Bryce said that we are always pursuing new access sites, especially on the Tongue and Yellowstone. If anyone hears anything, please let him know. The big demand is for access close to the dam. BLM has found a 40-acre section and we are working with them and Spring Creek Coal Mine had some mitigation money. Hopefully by this fall, a latrine and a fence will be there where people can take a boat out or fish. However, we are working with the adjacent landowner and Bryce was hoping to know within a week whether he has found a better and more suitable site for both parties.

At this point, it was decided that the next meeting would be held January 16, 2008 at the Regional FWP office beginning at 4 pm and ending by 8:30 pm.

We will need to discuss members' two-year terms that are coming to an end.

Members were thanked for their participation in this topic and the meeting was adjourned.

*-END-*