

## **CAC Meeting Summary**

### **March 12, 2008**

#### Guest Speakers:

Chris Smith, Deputy Director

Chris Hunter, Fisheries Division Administrator

#### Awards:

- Chuck Hunt of Flathead Wildlife, Inc. presented an award to Jim Vashro for his many years of dedication to sportsmen and youth in northwest Montana.
- John Fraley presented the 2008 Outstanding Hunter Behavior Award to Jim Watson, a Hunter Education Instructor. Jim received the award for his work with youth hunters, and his work on protecting habitat for wildlife and recreation.

#### Westslope Cutthroat Trout (WCT) Sub-Committee Report

- Preparation continues for the May 14<sup>th</sup> Open House & Public Meeting
- News Release will go out late March, mid-April and again shortly before the May 14<sup>th</sup> public meeting.
- Black Lake & Blackfoot Lake will be aggressively re-stocked this summer.

#### Hatchery Issues / Chris Hunter

Three different paths have led us to the consideration of the sale of the Flathead Lake Salmon Hatchery. They are:

- The Rose Creek Hatchery (in Creston, on Riverside Rd.) currently has an undeveloped water right. If the water right is not used, it is possible that it could revert.
- The Salmon Hatchery at Flathead Lake is 96 years old. There is not a lot of capacity. There have been problems over the years with the hatchery itself and with the City of Lakeside over the water supply. The current water supply is approximately 250 gpm.
- CSKT completed the Jocko River Restoration project and has expressed an interest in buying the Arlee Hatchery from FWP. The problem is that there will not be enough money from the sale of the Arlee hatchery to fund the hatchery system.

The Flathead Lake Salmon Hatchery site consists of 2.25 acres on Flathead Lake with 675 feet of frontage and an additional 14 acres across Hwy 93. The thought being considered is to possibly sell this site to raise enough revenue to fund the construction of the Rose Creek Hatchery which is currently estimated to be in the \$5 Million range or come up with some other creative way to retain some of the Flathead Lake site and still be able to extract the funding that is needed.

Flathead County Parks Board member, Jim Watson pleads that the county parks system would very much like to see this land (Flathead Lake Salmon Hatchery) remain public land.

Items to consider before selling the Flathead Lake Salmon Hatchery site and questions asked:

- It is irreplaceable. The Department already owns this jewel. The entire Flathead area continues to grow and “they” just aren’t making anymore lakefront properties.
- The west side of Flathead Lake has serious access issues. The only access on the increasingly populated northwest side of Flathead Lake is the 1.3-acre site in Somers and the West Shore State Park. The hatchery site is located just 1.5 miles south of the current Somers Fishing Access Site, which in the 2006 season had 70,000 visitors of which 87% were residents. It is important to note that the Somers Fishing Access Site is the primary boat launch for the area. It is also important to note that Flathead County owns the swimming area adjacent to the state’s fishing access site in Somers.
- How will FWP guarantee that the proceeds of any sale or arrangement concerning the Flathead Lake Salmon Hatchery Site will actually make it to Rose Creek for the construction of the new hatchery. There was \$850K in the mid-80’s and \$200K in the late 80’s that was appropriated and here we are today talking about the money that is needed as though this wasn’t already asked for that long ago.
- How does or will Sekokini Springs Hatchery fit in to the hatchery system in northwest Montana?

#### Ft. Peck Funding Issues / Chris Hunter

##### **Facts**

- The Ft. Peck Hatchery consists of a 22,000 square foot building containing egg hatching are and equipment, 45 tanks (for warm or coldwater fish culture) and 12 circular tanks in a separate room for pallid sturgeon culture. 100 acres with 44 ponds for warm water fish culture and 8 raceways for coldwater fish culture.
- Water Supply: water is pumped from one of the dredge ponds; it is filtered, heated and treated with ozone. Pumping and heating is quite expensive.
- Staffing: Hatchery manager (vacant); assistant manager; two fish culturists.
- Currently producing
  - 20 million walleye fry
  - 2 million walleye fingerling
  - 200,000 Chinook salmon
  - (Walleye production is maximized – cannot produce anymore without significant changes in facility and operation.)
- Funding and Costs
  - Funding received by proceeds of warm water stamp is approximately \$250,000 / year.
  - Cost to operate at current level: \$360 - \$400K annually.
  - Cost to operate at full capacity: \$500K annually
- Potential additional production
  - 150,000 lake trout
  - 210,000 rainbow trout
  - 81,000 pallid sturgeon

#### **Hatchery Funding Options:** (Taken from news release dated 3-11-08)

With Montana’s new state-of-the-art fish hatchery operating well below full capacity, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks is seeking comment on two funding options that could allow the Fort Peck Multi-Species Fish Hatchery to raise and stock more fish.

The Fort Peck Multi-Species Fish Hatchery, completed in 2006, is one of the newest and most advanced hatcheries in the U.S.

"The Fort Peck Hatchery is a modern aquaculture facility," said Chris Hunter, FWP's Fisheries Division chief in Helena. "By any standard, the hatchery has tremendous capacity and is technically sophisticated. Unfortunately, it's also misunderstood, under funded and under used."

The hatchery is located southeast of Glasgow on the banks of the Missouri River below Fort Peck Dam on about 100 acres leased from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the federal agency that designed and built the facility.

In 1999, the Montana Legislature authorized the sale of a \$5 warm water stamp to fund Fort Peck Hatchery operations. The stamp, required of anglers who pursue warm water fish like walleye and bass in certain Montana waters, is the only source of income to run the hatchery's daily operations. Sales bring in about \$250,000 a year, which is enough to cover only about half of the hatchery's annual operations and maintenance costs. Consequently, the hatchery is run well below capacity with the exception of walleye production, which is maximized.

When it created the warm-water stamp, the Montana Legislature also limited the type of fish that could be raised at the hatchery to certain warm water fish and Chinook salmon.

"There are more than 100 ponds and small lakes in northeastern Montana—and hundreds of children and families—that would benefit from allowing some trout production at the Fort Peck hatchery," Hunter said. "As it stands today, we're wasting time, space, energy and thousands of dollars more in gasoline to truck fish from Great Falls and Lewistown that could be reared at Fort Peck. We need to find a way to make it work for everyone."

Facing another year of operating and maintaining the \$22 million facility with stamp-sale funds, FWP officials, local advisory groups, legislators, angling clubs and others worked together over the past year to establish two different funding options that could boost the hatchery's budget and production potential.

For resident and nonresident anglers, the options include:

- Paying an additional \$3 for a warm water stamp. This option, however, will not remove restrictions on what may be raised at the hatchery. The new \$8 stamp fee would only be paid by anglers who fish for warm water species in certain Montana waters. This option would raise an additional \$150,000 annually, for a total of \$400,000. The hatchery would continue to run below capacity.
- Paying an additional \$1-2 for a general fishing license. The option would remove from Montana law the warm water stamp requirement and the restrictions on species raised at the hatchery. Raising warm water fish to meet stocking requests, however, will continue to be the hatchery's top priority. In addition, an advisory committee would be established to develop requests for fish production at the Fort Peck Multi-Species Fish Hatchery. This option would raise about \$400,000 to \$600,000 annually. The hatchery could be run at capacity.

The Fort Peck facility can raise more than 20 million walleye fry and 2 million walleye fingerlings each year. Recently, some 27,000 northern pike and 180,000 Chinook salmon were also produced at the hatchery for stocking in Fort Peck, Tiber, Nelson and Fresno reservoirs and in Lake Frances.

Hunter said that once walleyes are stocked, however, the Fort Peck hatchery sits virtually empty for several months. He said the massive hatchery could also produce tiger muskies, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, channel catfish, sauger, and endangered pallid sturgeon. It's capable of producing rainbow trout and lake trout without disrupting or displacing any warm water fish production.

FWP will take public comment on the options associated with the operation of the Fort Peck Multi-Species Fish Hatchery beginning Wednesday, March 12 through April 15. FWP has arranged to take comment through FWP's website at [www.fwp.mt.gov](http://www.fwp.mt.gov). Click "Fort Peck Hatchery." Send email comments to [FWPFortPeckComments@mt.gov](mailto:FWPFortPeckComments@mt.gov). Send written comments to: Fort Peck Hatchery Funding, Montana FWP, P.O. Box 200701; Helena, MT 59620-0701.

#### Concerns or points raised during CAC meeting

- Are any fish from the Ft. Peck Hatchery coming west of the divide? - No, not currently.
- Who or what is the primary opposition to just raising the general fishing license? - R3 is opposed and both Walleye & Trout unlimited prefer raising the warmwater stamp.
- Where does hatcheries fall on the Department's list of priorities? More specifically, where does Ft. Peck and Rose Creek fall in the hatchery priority list?
- We're squabbling over a couple of bucks? – We need a general license increase of considerably more than just a couple of bucks so that you (FWP) can just get on with it. (Approximately 160K – 200K people buy a general fishing license each year.)

#### General Questions to Deputy Director (any topic)

- Could you please give a recap of the Commission meeting that is taking place tomorrow and what are they "re-visiting"? – After the big game regulation commission meeting that already took place, there continued to be considerable opposition from outfitters, hunters, etc regarding the elk archery regulations outside of the Breaks as well as the antelope archery regulations. The commission will re-visit these issues at tomorrows meeting.
- How much longer will the state continue to have only 5 commissioners when we have 7 geographic regions?

Adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

**Next meeting will be scheduled via email.**