REGION 7
CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL
Meeting Notes
April 16, 2008

R-7 FWP ATTENDANCE: Mike Moore, John Ensign, Dwayne Andrews, Windy Davis, Brad Schmitz, Ginger Omland, Steve Atwood, and John Little.

HELENA FWP: Hank Worsech (License Bureau Chief), Neal Whitney (License Business Analyst), and Alan Charles (Landowner Sportsman Coordinator).

CAC ATTENDANCE: Rob Reukauf, Art Hayes, Julie Jordan, Greg Mohr, Chris Pileski, Fulton Castleberry, Warren Broeder, and Todd Steadman

ABSENT: Mary Zeiss Stange, Jim Schaefer, and Scott Studiner

Dwayne Andrews – Welcome

Dwayne Andrews chaired the meeting in the absence of Bryce Christensen. He distributed handouts related to the topics of this meeting which were access issues and the new archery regulations in the breaks. Dwayne expressed sentiments regarding the great loss of Mark Forman, CAC member, who was killed in a tragic farm accident. One handout concerned the big game regulation changes. The other handout was from the United Property Owners of Montana, Inc which is a group of landowners that were not happy with the archery changes.

Rob R. passed out handouts from Mark Robbins, one of the principals of United Property Owners, and is a letter in response to Mark Henckel with some of the comments they have been taking on the blogs on the Outdoor section of the Gazette. The other one is regarding the ballot initiatives of which he hopes everyone will read, especially anyone who has private property in the state.

Hank Worsech and Neal Whitney FWP Licensing

Hank and Neal presented a license overview of drawings. Neal explained how the drawings were conducted:

1. The quota is set by the FWP Commission and once that quota is set, it is entered into the computer.
2. Fifteen percent of the district quota is set aside for landowner preference for the species that allow that which are antelope, deer B, special deer permits and elk.
3. Ten percent of the district quota is set as the maximum nonresident quota for that district.

4. The first set of drawings is called a restricted landowner preference drawing. Nonresident and resident landowners are drawn together unless the total nonresident quota is reached in which case nonresidents are excluded the rest of the restricted drawings.
5. The next step is a restricted regular drawing for everyone else that was unsuccessful for the district, drawing the remaining quota for the district. Residents and nonresidents are drawn together unless the total nonresident quota is reached in which case nonresidents are shut out of the rest of the restricted drawing.
6. As soon as all first choice applicants are drawn for that particular district, if the quota has not been met, then a 2nd choice and 3rd choice drawing takes place. Nonresidents are drawn with residents until the point when their nonresident quota is met.
7. If after the restricted 3rd choice drawing, there is still quota left and there are nonresidents who were not drawn for that district, the nonresident quota is lifted and nonresidents are drawn until the total quota is met.
8. Any quota remaining after the unrestricted drawing becomes available as surplus licenses and sold over the counter.

Rob R. inquired about the landowner sponsored license drawings.

Hank explained there are two drawings with the landowner sponsor license. One drawing is with people owning 640 acres or more. You are allowed to sponsor up to 15 people and you are guaranteed one on the first draw and one on the second draw before it goes in the general drawing. The problem is when people apply as a party of five. You cannot break up a party so those people don't go through the first and second drawings if applying as a party.

The drawing for nonresident combination licenses was held April 14th. Hank handed out a sheet with license statistics for this year.

Todd Steadman wondered if the nonresident antelope licenses were always at a 10% cap to which Hank replied yes.

Hank said there was about 29 million on nonresident combo applications received this year and approximately only about nine million refunded.

Todd S. asked how the nonresident outfitter sponsored license fees set. Hank said a group was appointed by the Director consisting of two outfitters, two sportsmen, and two hunters of which one is a nonresident hunter, and then a commissioner. They meet in August to review the variable priced licenses in the past. The price is set to hit the target quota so as the quota goes down, the price will go up to reduce the people buying licenses. So they make recommendations to the commission and the commission finalizes them.

John Ensign Presentation (Wildlife Manager)

John did a recap of the last CAC meeting in January when they were in the season-setting process and discussed all of the tentative proposals that the department was looking at then. There were over 4,000 comments. The commission met the 20th of February to decide on these proposals. One of the main discussions were the elk archery permits, both in the Missouri River Breaks and outside the breaks:

Missouri River Breaks
In 2008, limited ES permits; any choice; 100% of 3-year average; limited antlerless permits (range 50-300) 2nd choice (after 1st choice ES in same district).
In 2009, limited ES permits; any choice; 75% of 3-year average; limited antlerless permits (range 50-300) 2nd choice (after 1st choice ES in same district)
Outside Breaks
In 2008, 1st, 2nd, or 3rd choice unlimited ES permits; general license antlerless; districts "bundled" into groups.
In 2009, limited ES permits; any choice; 100% of 2008 application; general license antlerless; districts "bundled" into groups.

The Commission directed the department to organize a nine-member archery panel, for which the nomination period ended last week, with the idea to recommend regulations in the 23 hunting districts outside the Missouri Breaks. After the group has met, they would like to have them visit with all the Citizen's Advisory Committees around the state.

John discussed a letter that Rob R. handed out from Kurt Kephart, Public Wildlife Organization. This group is proposing three initiatives to the Secretary of State. A lengthy discussion followed .

Rob R. thought everyone was pretty vulnerable right now with the high price of gas and prices escalating on everything.

Mike M. said the rifle hunters complained because the archery hunters did not have to apply for a tag and that was the primary reason for this in the beginning.

John replied that the big question now is how many people will actually apply for archery now that they are being forced to apply rather than just having to use a general tag. He also said people that actually take a permit and hunt is 45 percent. His hope is to find good compromise for everyone.

Todd S expressed a point of hopelessness from all sides, outfitters, landowners, etc. They are getting tired of not being appreciated.

Rob mentioned the fact that a lot of the hunters think they can access whatever land they want with no respect for the land or landowner.

Chris P. wondered if there was a way that FWP could possibly put together a presentation that can help to educate the public regarding issues with access to private land.

Alan – PLPW is putting together a proposal for something that is geared toward private land access issues for landowners to get their point across to hunters with respect to the land.

Fulton C. commented that Montana is probably more open than of the other states as far as access.

Rob inquired about access in Utah and some of the blogs he had read regarding that.

Brad worked for Utah for 8 years and explained how their program originated. It began because they had lost all access. He praised Montana's program because it has such a great amount of access and is way above where Utah is at this point.

Alan said that they looked at Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana and Utah as it relates to elk management to see what works and doesn't work and in each one of those states, Colorado and Utah were both faced with over-objective elk populations with the biggest challenge being an inability to get cow elk harvested on private land.

Fulton wondered if FWP did news releases comparing Montana with some of these other states if it would have a positive effect with the general public.

Mike M. said different strategies were discussed and one was to have director staff put out series of articles comparing us with other states as far as access is concerned.

Chris Pileski Presentation

Chris began his presentation with a tribute to Mark Forman and what a great impact his passing has had on his family and the general recreating public and the opportunity he provided to the public. He went on to say that a lot of times, sportsmen and the recreating public take people like Mark and access for granted which is not always the case. He said we are losing long-time block management cooperators for other reasons as well. For years, we have talked about what we can do to increase the program but instead, he thinks we should start focusing our efforts on maintaining what we have now by appreciating the cooperators in the program with more accommodations if available. All the programs need to be as flexible and adaptable as possible. In other words, if it is legal, Chris thought it should be considered as an option.

Chris thought temporary easements or access opportunities should be looked at and that in order to tackle some of these issues, the CAC should suggest that FWP policy may have to be changed to obtain that access.

Art Hays said that block management is already one of the best programs so their time and effort needs to be spent on improving the program.

Rob mentioned that he has been trying to get a FAS started in Prairie County for quite some time now. He doesn't understand why when there is a prime piece of land for access, FWP will not pay anything extra because of FWP policy.

Brad said change in and to that policy would come from groups like the Citizen's Advisory Council.

John L. said they has been some success with pushing recreational value rather than ag values.

Todd said what happens is that the people feel unappreciated. Todd stated that most of the block management groups just want to be appreciated.

Chris said three types of private landowners. 1) those that support public access 2) those that are always going to be leased for outfitting and; 3) those that are in between. Those that we have right now in our block management program are in the first group and asked how much time and effort should we spend pursuing the best management practices of these people.

John E. stated block management needs to be compensated in some way to show the appreciation for these people.

Citizen Advisory Council Access Issue Ideas Continued

Dwayne asked each individual council member for their suggested solutions to access issues and ways to improve the Block Management Program. The following suggestions were heard:

Greg M – We have to get out of this mentality that's against the policy. We are an advisement type of council, so we need to advise the state. He then asked if anyone has interviewed people that have dropped out of block management and why they did so. He thought there needs to be some way to reward people (property taxes paid) for people in Block Management. A tax break would be good. Block Management has made hunters lazy when they don't have to ask anymore when they can just get permission slips from box. They do not have face-to-face contact with the rancher.

Chris P – Block Management program needs to have flexibility in all aspects of operation. The fee structure needs to be looked at.

Rob R - It is about the money and is extra income coming in to the ranchers which they can use with fuel costs and feed costs eating them up. The idea of sending money back to Helena which is earmarked for the Block Management program does not make sense.

That money should be distributed out amongst the cooperators that are here. He feels there should be increased compensation for Block Management cooperators.

Fulton C - Feels Block Management cooperators are taken for granted. FWP has always furnished someone for their signups. He and fellow cooperators would like the opportunity to discuss more things regarding block management. Fulton also thought there should be credit given for the years spent in program and that acreage should be considered more.

Art H – Thought the workdays with sportsmen and landowners helping Block Management cooperators are good. He believes an increase in the fee rate for years spent in the program is a good idea. Cooperator licenses to all owners of record worries him because of the amount of owners there may be. Incentives for longevity or extra income are good.

Julie J - Asked if there has been a survey done of people who have dropped out of Block Management. Steve said Alan had and that sometimes, they won't say how they feel and other times, it is the money. Alan said two things have been done. 1) The audit division did an audit. 2) Alan did survey of (a) why they joined Block Management, (b) why they got out, and (c) what could be done different. Answers varied as some were personal in nature; some didn't have wildlife problems; and some got offered more money. Julie asked about the "Owning Eden" video and felt it needs to get out to people that don't understand or possibly develop one on "Hunting Eden" to make the hunters understand what services Block Management cooperators are providing for them.

Todd S - Compared retail to Block Management as far as low-cost provider and value dealers. Low-cost provider is the easiest one because you can just sell everything for less but if you are a value dealer, you provide value in what you sell. He thought, FWP, the State of Montana, and Block Management needs to determine if they are low cost providers or value dealers because you can't be both. If you provide value, who are you going to provide it to: the landowner, sportsman or a combination of both. If it is just money, how much will it take? Todd thought it is lack of appreciation that makes Block Management cooperators drop out. He thinks we need to take a different direction. The reason they are in Block Management is because they want to provide the service and access for residents and nonresidents. Providing a healthy work environment for landowners will in turn provide the best value for the sportsman. Value is the key. Find out what the landowner wants.

Warren B - Related a story about someone who is in Block Management and signed up because he wanted some patrol and regulation with hunters. The reason he would get out would be because of bad hunters. One suggestion would be to pay the Block Management cooperator when the FWP coordinator went to sign them up again instead of having to wait for the check to come. Warren also suggested something like a two part tag to sort of give the landowners a "tip" when they turned in the other half of the tag to FWP. The bottom line, he thought, is that it is not all money but money does matter.

Dwayne read Scott S. comments which he had emailed:

Scott S – Most of ranches that were in Block Management program but are now leased to outfitters are doing so because of such things as pricing and other various points of control. They can now defer to the outfitter when asked about hunting. In the past, public hunters have ruined range improvement structures such as fences. Some landowners feel they have the ability to manage wildlife as they see fit. Some landowners would like to be in the program for doe harvest or strictly for buck harvest. Some landowners may sign a longer contract if there was a program to develop better habitat or specifically food plots within their ranch with FWP. Is there flexibility? Are there programs available? Some landowners may not understand their land's potential for wildlife. Scott suggested that FWP looks at some of the flexibility in their program to allow for a variety of opportunity and that they analyze the benefit of developing a "volunteer patrol" group and training. Scott realizes the limitations, but there are responsible publics that would be happy to help ranches patrol and educate other publics throughout the season.

Art thought extra enforcement patrol is a good selling point. Art wondered if Block Management privileges could be pulled if hunters don't behave. (statewide)

Alan says there are ARM rules where they can be cited for abusing privileges of using Block Management.

John E. said the best way to do that is to pull their hunting privileges but Art said there are a lot of violations that their hunting privileges aren't able to be pulled. Art said maybe if Block Management was added to that, it would have a better impact.

There was quite a bit of discussion in favor of paying property taxes for Block Management cooperators.

John E. asked how FWP can show appreciation for folks that allow public hunting that are not in Block Management. Chris P. suggested they be given an affidavit or something to be mailed in to FWP for compensation. Greg M. said some people don't want to be in Block Management but still manage the hunters on their land. Rob thought one idea would be to give a slip to landowners that are not in Block Management and, in the end, turn them in and have drawing, for example, a new pickup. Alan C. said one of the things that they were asked to do was to verify factual information of how private landowners are allowing and managing hunting on their land. Fulton C. said that some of the people feel like Block Management cooperators are just in business for FWP.

Alan said there has to be effective ways to recognize the efforts of Block Management cooperators and private landowners that allow public access.

Todd asked what the impact would be to just eliminate property taxes and opening up opportunity as a citizen. He thought it would really have some merit.

John E. said the hunting public is shifting and is turning more to the recreational value other than harvesting something. Brad thought more opportunities in hunting (doe harvest increase) would increase hunter numbers. Montana Challenge is one of the biggest industries in Montana.

Greg wondered why Montana Challenge has not been on PBS and/or provided to realtors for nonresidents that want to buy something in Montana. Greg and Chris both thought that "Owning Eden" and "Path to Eden" should be shown to HE students, landowners, hunters, and everyone else with any interest in the land.

Todd suggested you hire a landowner to spread the word because he is "one of them." People are always more willing to listen to "one of their own." He also asked why nonresident landowners cannot be given a license to hunt as compensation for joining Block Management. Alan C. responded that, at the last coordinator's meeting, they adopted for this year, if you are a nonresident and wants to join block management, they can offer them a license for this year but cannot give them, legally, two licenses for one year of enrollment.

Mike M. suggested compensating a landowner to convince a neighbor to join Block Management.

Dwayne set the date for the NEXT CAC MEETING WHICH WILL BE JULY 16, 2008.

Public Comment

Dean Siefert attended the public comment period.

He voiced his opinions on the Pumpkin Creek land exchange.