## Region 4 CAC Meeting Minutes December 5, 2007

FWP Staff – Gary Bertellotti, Fred Schultz, Graham Taylor, Bruce Auchly, Brian Golie, Bruce Auchly and Kyqn Kuka

CAC Members – Joe Schaffer, Judie Suden, Mike Labriola, Doug Deffe', Charles Bocock, Rocky Harber, Robert Facklum, Fred Davison and Deanna Robbins

Public/Guests – Shannon Taylor, MSU Professor

Gary opened the meeting and went over the agenda and asked if there were any additions to the agenda.

## **Member Issues:**

Gary went around the table and asked CAC members what issues or discussions they are hearing from their constituents.

Fred Davison – Is a little concerned about the wolf population especially with the news that there may be a pack in the Little Belts. Also concerned about the local deer population around the town of Highwood. A few ranches close to some of the main roads don't allow deer hunting and he is definitely seeing an increase in deer and car accidents. In fact he encountered a deer a few weeks back with his vehicle. Wanted to know how to get road signs up to warn folks. Says he has to swerve out of the way of deer at least twice every time he travels to Belt in the evenings. It was suggested he get the neighbors and town council, if there is one, to address the problem locally. Can contact Highway Department about a sign or have the town do it.

Deanna Robbins – Wondered why the elk season extension didn't allow permit holders to shoot bulls in HD 417? When the quota is established what harm would it do to let permit holders fill their tag for a bull? Graham Taylor stated that our suggestion for the extended season was for antlerless only in all our districts. Having a quota doesn't necessarily mean the success rate will change year to year in each hunting district. Hunting districts usually are pretty consistent from year to year due to limiting factors in each district. Bottom line is our recommendations went to the Commission and they sorted things out and voted and this is the season we got based on their recommendations. Different options were discussed but the Commission gave us what we got for the extended season.

Judie Sudan – She brought up some concerns with the Forest Service Travel Plan especially camping restrictions that went from camping to within 300 feet of the road to

only the length of vehicle and trailer. She has heard a lot of concerns about that. Also mentioned she is seeing a lot of articles that negatively impact trapping and wondered how this would affect trapping of wolves. At this point there is no impact as we are still working on setting wolf season guidelines and rules.

Joe Schaffer – Folks he has talked to are generally favorable about the Elk Extension Season. Question is – is the five-week season working? Gary answered that every year an extension to the season is discussed the fourth week of the regular hunting season. This year due to overwhelming circumstances such as the weather, which affected a good elk harvest in some areas the season was extended. Shouldn't affect the five-week season having the extension. Gary received numerous calls about the extension and the biggest complaint was in keeping the bull season open in the Little Belts.

Received some interest from folks about a late muzzleloader season. There is a passionate following for a muzzleloader season.

He received several favorable comments on the proposed turkey release south of Great Falls.

As far as the proposal to change season dates for big game to the same date each year versus a traditional opener on Sundays, it is a 50/50 on comments he is hearing.

Doug Deffe' – Wondered if it was possible to propose a reduction in cost of doe and cow elk licenses to folks who want to donate their wild game meat to the needy? Since meat now has to be processed by a certified butcher to be given away, it would reduce some of the cost for the hunter. A couple of ranches he hunts proposed this question. It would benefit the rancher, the hunter and those who want the donated meat. Shannon Taylor said in Bozeman the Safari Club donated \$10,000 to meat processors to process meat donated by hunters for the needy. There is a high demand for this meat. If you donate your animal and pay for the processing yourself, it is a tax write-off.

Mike Labriola – Has also heard some comments about the Forest Service Travel Plan and how it affects some campgrounds. He has heard some may shut down. One he was concerned with was the Dry Fork Camping area.

He is real interested in a muzzleloader season. He would be interested in further promoting a season.

He has heard from fly fishermen being concerned about over-limits taken by bait fishermen on streams during the fall and winter months. Warden Golie said he is hearing some of these complaints and different times of the year trout are more vulnerable to bait fishermen's offerings. He is not seeing these over-limits in the folks he is checking.

Rocky Harber – Had some concerns about a possible wolf pack in the area. Graham confirmed that there was a pack of 8 wolves in the Skunk Creek area and that a ranch there had some cattle depredation.

A couple members asked Rocky how the Dearborn Ranch handled hunting on the ranch. Rocky stated that the owner wishes to have lots of game on his ranch. He approached the owner though about harvesting some game on the ranch especially elk to keep the herd healthy and to be a good neighbor. Owner agreed and they take about 100 elk off of the ranch each year. They don't outfit or charge folks for taking these elk.

Deanna Robbins – Was curious haw the Devil's Kitchen Group operates. Would like a discussion about this in another meeting. Graham gave a little history on the group and invited anyone to attend. They meet about quarterly. Call the office and we will let you know when the next meeting is. The group started in 1988 and initially had a problem with elk but now they have branched out in other areas of concern such as cutthroat trout, etc.

## **New Business:**

Charles Bocock – State Ft Peck Hatchery Committee – Last meeting was held in Lewistown and 26 people showed up for the meeting with a couple of legislators absent. I drafted a bill for the next Legislature on hatchery funding and met with Senator Joe Tropila to discuss it. He liked it.

Biggest problem the committee seems to have is dealing with three groups — Wild Trout Unlimited, Walleyes Unlimited and Trout Unlimited. They can't seem to agree on much. Trout Unlimited stated that we don't need any more trout so raise the price of the warm water stamp and leave trout fishermen out of the funding process for the Ft Peck Hatchery. Walleyes Unlimited wants only walleye raised at the Ft Peck Hatchery. The Ft Peck Hatchery is a state of the art hatchery built by the Corps of Engineers. One of the problems with maintenance funding is that initially, since the hatchery was so close to the dam, the hatchery wasn't going to be charged for electricity. The local electricity coops got involved and said they were losing funds. So it ended up instead of free electricity we are now charged the highest commercial rates!

The committee started out with 14 different proposals to finance the state run hatcheries. Now we are down to 2-1) raise the warm water stamp for the maintenance costs at the Ft Peck Hatchery or 2) add a dollar amount to every fishing license. They want to form a new committee to determine where fish are needed to be raised and planted and to save dollars on transporting fish to lakes/reservoirs. This proposal to increase the fishing license would go beyond just meeting maintenance costs but would develop a contingency fund for hatchery emergencies, for example being able to replace a pump, or even build a new hatchery.

Some of the discussion was that Trout Unlimited doesn't want trout raised at the Ft Peck hatchery and actually Walleyes Unlimited at one point wanted all the facilities torn down and just keep the rearing ponds so trout couldn't be raised inside of the building. More to come.

Wolf Management – Judie Sudan stated that from what she is reading as of late it seems that trapping has a stigma against it. Are we going to do away with trapping as it pertains to wolves? At this time no. Within the month the Commission may adopt a tentative wolf hunting season depending on wolves are delisted. Season structure will be like the

present mountain lion season. Probably a fall hunting season and a winter trapping season. License fee has been set by the Legislature - \$19.00. We are discovering more wolves all the time and as recently as two weeks ago another pack was discovered. In our Wolf Management Plan the state set an objective of 15 breeding pairs (packs). Feds say we only need 10 breeding pairs (packs) but the state wants a more conservative standard. A pack is defined as 2 adults and 2 young of the year as of December 31.

Elk Issues – Elk Summit will be this weekend, December 8 in Bozeman. Recommend all members attend if you are interested in elk. Question came up as to will this extended season affect management hunts this winter? A lot that will depend on what kind of weather we have in January/February. Who can predict that? FWP is committed to the five-week season and of course that could change for various reasons but the reason we had the extension this year was due to weather, which affected harvest. We have several elk management units that are above objectives which also was a concern considered in extending the season.

Proposed Elk Archery Seasons – In the Missouri River Breaks area, which includes hunting districts 410,417,620,621,622,630,631, 632 and 700, FWP is recommending going from unlimited archery permits to limited number of permits. These are for either sex archery permits. Three alternatives are being proposed. 1) 90% of the number of resident permits issued, average of the last three years. Nonresidents will thus get 10% of this quota. 2) Taking the above model and extending it statewide to everywhere there are limited rifle permits. Problem with doing that is to determine number of hunters who hunt a particular district as archers. 3) Keep archery season structures as they are. Montana Bowhunters Association is also submitting a proposal similar to our first alternative but they want to issue 110% of the number of resident permits. Top reason for doing it is a swell of public comment about land being leased up because of unlimited permits which means it is harder for FWP to manage the elk herd in that area and less public access.

Deanna Robbins – Being a landowner, rancher and outfitter in the area and being a Montanan who has lived in that area her whole life, Hunting District 417, she is concerned this proposal for limited permits in the Missouri Breaks area. She gave a talk for her reasons for being against it: This is not the first time this proposal has come up. It came up in 1999 and was dropped in 2000. The department did an extensive survey of archers in the area and had a good response rate and 60% requested that the season stay as it is. Thus the proposal was dropped. In 2004 the 10-year Elk Management Plan came on board and there was again a possible proposal to limit elk permits in the breaks area. In the 2007 legislature Senate Bill 34 was offered that gave FWP authority to limit permits in unlimited areas and this bill died. At present current restrictions in the drawing process mandate that you choose between an archery permit or gun permit in the breaks area. So basically you have to choose your weapon. In reality Nonresidents are already limited to 17,000 elk licenses of which 5,500 are set-aside for outfitters. Deanna passed around a handout – Breaks Archery Permits –2006 drawing results she had taken off the FWP website and Breaks Archery Permits –2007 drawing results they she got

from Region 4 wildlife office. In talking to biologists in the breaks area she provided the following data on the handout: Missouri Breaks Archery Hunting Data:

- 1) Elk numbers are above target in all HD's, with the possible exception of 410-21
- 2) Bull to cow ratio is at or above target range in all HD's
- 3) Hunter numbers have remained static, until an increase in 2007
- 4) Of the 2225 reported increased hunters from 2006 to 2007, 76.8% were residents
- 5) Approximately 30% of all Breaks archery hunters in 2006 were nonresidents
- 6) Approximately 27% of all Breaks archery hunters in 2007 were nonresidents

Conclusions that can be drawn from the above statistics:

- 1) Elk numbers are adequate or above in all HD's
- 2) Bull to cow ration is at or above target range in all HD's
- 3) More than 72% of hunters in the Breaks area in 2007 were residents
- 4) The percentage of nonresidents hunting the Breaks dropped from 2006 to 2007
- 5) The Breaks are providing excellent resident hunting opportunity with little effect on the resource
- 6) Biological data does not support a need to limit archer permits
- 7) Social data does not support a need to limit archery permits
- 8) Social data does not support a need to limit nonresidents

Biggest change in the breaks area (HD's 410 and 417) would be decreasing nonresident archers from approximately 570 to 160. Resident archer numbers would not be affected by FWP limited permit proposals. It is possible that the Weaver Ranch purchase and its publicity may have influenced or triggered concern in this area. Statistics don't support social or biological problems. The decision to limit permits should be based on facts and biological information. We should not be managing the area on perceptions but real facts.

Gary thanked Deanna for her information. It should be noted that FWP is not against landowners or outfitters in this area. This issue is about access and our ability to manage elk.

## **Other Comets:**

Graham Taylor handed out a sheet on current season dates process versus fixed dates for 2009. This will be a big topic when the commission discusses and issues their tentatives.

The CAC wanted to thank our Chairman Joe Schaffer for writing that interesting article about the CAC for the Great Falls Tribune. Very interesting and informative.

We want to thank the Dearborn Ranch and Rocky Harber for inviting us to have the meeting there. Accommodations were great and a special thanks to Debbie Harber and Cindy Golie for preparing and serving the evening meal. It was delicious. Thanks also to Rocky for hosting a tour of the ranch.

Due to time constraints we didn't get to review our Region 4 CAC Charter prepared by Joe Schaffer. Updated copies were emailed and hard copies handed out. Please review it and make corrections and if you have other concerns please forward those items on to Joe Schaffer. We will discuss and hopefully finalize this process at our next CAC meeting.

Next Meeting – Wednesday, February 13<sup>th</sup> at the Region 4 Headquarters, 4:00 to 8:30 pm.