Region 6 Citizens Advisory Council Minutes June 2, 2008 R-6 Headquarters, Glasgow

CAC members present: Howard Pippin, Carl Totman, Connie Iversen, Bernie Hart, Scott Billingsley, Bob Smith, Tom Burch, Dennis Idler, Fran Buell, Darlyne Dascher,

CAC members absent: Nick Siebrasse, Richard Stuker, John Crohn, Dustin Hill, Steve Sukut

FWP staff present: Pat Gunderson, Howard Wentland, Bill Wiedenheft, Mike Herman, Woody Baxter, Ron Selden

Guests: None

Bill Wiedenheft welcomed the group and provided agenda overview. This is Bill's last CAC meeting as he is retiring at the end of the month. New Information Officer Ron Selden was introduced.

CAC Roundtable

Tom Burch, Fort Peck – Tom expressed concern about a public toilet being foul & in disrepair at or near the Intake FAS in R-7. Woody said he'd check into it again and determine whether it's actually on state property or not.

Tom also expressed his displeasure regarding BLM and CMR wilderness proposals in our area. He wants CAC to develop a formal position on the issue and recommend no additional wilderness designations in R-6. He also wants FWP to put more resources toward land acquisition and boat ramps. He said Eastern MT, because of its sparse population, often gets shorted when it comes to funding. Woody added that acquisition and site development money can be used for a variety of projects, but a local government must be involved throughout the process.

Dennis Idler, Glasgow – Dennis had questions about the status of state wolf hunting proposals. It was agreed that FWP Wolf Program Coordinator Carolyn Sime would be invited to the next CAC meeting.

Fran Buell, Gildford – The Montana Trappers Association is deeply involved in countering the anti-trapping efforts of the FootLoose Montana, which she says is deeply tied to the Humane Society. She's traveled to four of FWP's seven regions to discuss the broader push to ban all types of trapping in the U.S. Fran also detailed the upcoming Youth Trapper Camp, which her group co-sponsors with FWP and Montana 4-H.

Howard Pippin, Saco – He's been getting a few questions from folks in his area about upcoming changes in 2008 big-game regulations. He said it would be good to separate

the regulations by region like the annual BMA booklets. That would ease some of the confusion.

Carl Totman, Malta – Carl also believes our hunting regs are hard to understand. He thinks they tend to be negative because they detail all the things hunters can't do, rather than what they can.

Connie Iverson, Culbertson – Pheasant numbers are very strong in her area, and she's also seeing a lot of deer and antelope fawns this year.

Bernie Hart, Hinsdale – He raised issues about public access and asked about the best folks to contact at FWP to check on property ownership. Pat and Harold said the first step is to check with the county where the property lies. Harold added that if a person can get to the land legally (on a public road), there is public access. Pat said FWP is working to improve signage on public sites.

Bob Smith, Poplar – Folks in his area are concerned about low water in Little Muddy Creek and the Poplar River. He said a lot of water is being pulled at Medicine Lake. Bill noted there is a treaty with Canada over Poplar River flows administered through DNRC.

Steve Sukut, Glasgow – (written comments) He's concerned about fishing being poor in the Kiwanis Park pond at Fort Peck. He's jokingly telling folks it's because they're trout from Lewistown. He's hearing from a number of folks who support the proposed Cornwell Ranch conservation easement.

Scott Billingsley, Glasgow – Scott is current president of Hi-Line Gobblers and wants to see more turkeys throughout R-6. He'd also like to be updated on the status of stocked ponds in the area. They are used by a lot of people, and he'd like to see more emphasis put into managing them. Bill said it's tough to keep up with pond stocking because they're used so much, but the crews are trying.

Scott also would like to see kid fishing improved at Kiwanis Park; he's very pleased with the quality of fishing at Glasgow's Home Run Pond. He's also in favor of the new FAS proposed for Alkali Creek along the Milk River about four miles SW of Malta. Pat added that project's EA should be put in area libraries so the public has more opportunities to review it.

R-6 Program Updates

PARKS: Woody – Brush Lake SP is in the second year of operation and is still day-use only. Still working on potential turnover of Nelson Reservoir area from BOR to FWP. There's some internal debate within FWP that needs to be resolved as to what properties and type of management the Department would like to administer there. Bear Paw Lake FAS has camp hosts again this year. Some improvements are going to take place at Faber Reservoir, located about 25 miles south of Chinook. Fresno Tailwater FAS, west of Havre, is getting some major improvements in July.

ENFORCEMENT: Mike – New warden Plentywood-based warden being hired; new warden trainee starting in Havre.

FISHERIES: Bill – The funding saga at the Fort Peck State Fish Hatchery continues. The agency recently asked the public to weigh in on two funding proposals for future operations. The options included having anglers pay an additional \$3 for an annual warm water stamp, which would allow the hatchery to continue to run at current levels; or paying an additional \$1 or \$2 for a general fishing license and allow the hatchery to expand production to include additional fish while maintaining its focus on maximum walleye production.

FWP received about 150 public comments on the two potential scenarios. The general license increase idea was supported by about a 15-to-1 margin over a potential boost in warm water license fees. FWP also received a few alternative-funding suggestions, including a petition seeking to raise nonresident fees. The two options presented would apply to resident, as well as nonresident, anglers. Now it is up to the Legislature to proceed.

The paddlefish season to-date was reviewed. There is a 500-fish quota and about half have been harvested so far. That means the quota likely won't be met. Extremely high flows in the Missouri should help paddlefish spawning & recruitment this year.

The walleye egg this spring only totaled about 48 million, compared to the annual average of 85 million eggs. Adverse weather conditions took their toll. In excess of 15 million walleye fry have already been stocked in Fort Peck this year.

COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION: Ron started in the new job late last week. He will be the main CAC contact person and will facilitate the group's next meeting.

WILDLIFE: Harold – The division is putting lots of effort into conservation easements (CE) and other public access and habitat protection projects. The completed Robert Olsen farm CE includes about 600 acres; the pending Cornwell CE contains about 24,000 private acres that are associated with another 106,000 acres of public ground.

Another project is located about 10 miles east of Glasgow along the Milk River. In addition, agreements are being pursued near Hinsdale, Harlem and near Nelson Reservoir.

There is considerable non-game monitoring taking place this summer, with three crews out in the field. We are currently conducting a statewide prairie dog survey under the supervision of Ryan Rauscher. The USFWS has received a new petition to list prairie dogs under the ESA. Also, a new round of plague is apparently going through dog towns south of Malta. A previously undiscovered and quite-large complex was recently found in Blaine County.

Carl Totman noted that some ranchers south of Malta are very upset with current prairie dog policies, and it wouldn't surprise him if some dog towns in the area are being eradicated to avoid intervention.

Program Priorities Discussion

(These were adapted from a list created at the R-6 staff meeting in Dec. 2007; time constraints prevented the CAC from completing issue discussion)

FISHERIES

- Improving fishing access throughout the region
- Better incorporate other recreational, non-fishing uses at FAS area and provide additional enforcement and public education regarding inappropriate uses
- Explore the impacts of fishing tournaments on other site use, especially use by families
- Work toward employing more wardens, especially on the Lower Missouri River
- Improve & stabilize Milk River flows

WILDLIFE

- Develop positions on BLM wilderness proposals on CMR
- Maintain and/or improve public access for hunting and other uses
- Monitor motorized vehicle impacts on wildlife habitat
- Increase agency interaction with landowners and the general public
- Provide more public education on conservation easements

PARKS

- Continue to combat vandalism through whatever means available
- Develop additional cooperative agreements for public access
- Develop additional trails programs

Miscellaneous

Tom Burch added that the CAC should set guidelines for member attendance. Howard Pippin said he's at the end of his term and will only seek a new appointment if an interested fellow from Saco doesn't, but he'd at least like to stay involved.

Next Meeting

2 p.m. Tuesday, Sept. 16, Malta (at either the First Interstate Bank meeting room or the Tin Cup Bar & Grill).

Tentative Agenda

- Seat new CAC members
- CAC Roundtable
- FWP Program Updates
- Carolyn Sime on wolf management
- Continued discussion on issue priorities (?)
- Jack Billingsley on the nine-member archery advisory group
- Developing positions on area BLM & CMR wilderness proposals

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