



## **DEPARTMENT UPDATES**

### **Mike Thompson – Wildlife**

Elk Plan Meetings have been scheduled to address the restructuring of plan objectives due to the creation of a new hunting district and the resulting reduction in size of several other districts. Mike provided an explanation of the Elk Plan adjustment process and the rationale.

### **Pat Saffel – Fisheries**

Fishing regulation changes are out for public comment. There are some closures and lure restrictions, primarily to protect bull trout habitat where populations are not responding to other measures. Ten years of drought-stress are resulting in marginal populations that need additional protection.

### **Jeff Darrah – Enforcement**

Plum Creek Timber Company (PCTC) has entered into a one year agreement to put 500,000 acres in Region 2 into the Block Management Program thereby keeping that land open to sportsmen.

### **Mack Long – Regional Supervisor**

At a meeting this spring, we found that most commercial timber companies such as Potlatch in Idaho and Weyerhaeuser in Washington are leasing blocks of land to hunters resulting in a loss of public access.

**Montana Legacy Project:** As PCTC transitions to a Real Estate Company, 320,000 acres have been identified as critical for access and habitat preservation. During the last six years, FWP, the Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Lands have been working with PCTC to preserve these critical lands.

1. First priority for FWP is the Marshall Block, also known as the Marshall Lake Country. Funding is nearly secure for this acquisition.
2. Second priority is 40,000 acres of Fish Creek lands between Alberton and Superior. This acquisition is currently unfunded.
3. Other critical lands have been identified in Chamberlain Creek, Potomac, and Lolo.
4. At Gold Creek, PCTC has sold five parcels at 160 acres each.

### **Opinions:**

1. Do not spend all the money available on one project.
2. There are multiple “once-in-a-lifetime” opportunities available simultaneously.
3. PCT sales will change the face of Montana. FWP is very happy they are willing to work with the State, the Federal government and various NGOs.

### **Wolf Update:**

Fact Sheet Handout – The injunction on the delisting process put the wolves back on the endangered list. The injunction stands if the case is not brought to court for a final decision.

At issue is a lack of connectivity between the three populations a noted in the recovery plan. The USFWS ignored that provision and based delisting on population growth. The Judge

held that delisting was done without adequate data. The 2004 study did not use all data available and connectivity was not documented. Genetic mixing will be difficult at best due to the territorial nature of wolves. Newer information may be able to overcome the genetics question. The original criteria required certain information but new tools precluded the old criteria processes. The genetic mixing in the other two populations was not documented in 2004.

The Judge also brought the Wyoming plan into question. With a population increase of 20-30% a year, genetic diversity was not the biggest concern. The Judge is only considering peer-reviewed publications and ignoring data from the biologists. There are few such publications available on this topic. One document from the University of Montana is in review at the Journal of Wildlife Management. After the data is published we are still nine to twelve months out for a ruling.

**Committee Discussion On Genetics:**

1. Genetics-one problem is that all of the DNA originated in Canada and will be similar across all three ecosystems.
2. Funding
3. Department strategy for controlling livestock depredation.

**Committee Concerns During the Injunction Period:**

1. Very much concerned about the size of the population increase during the injunction period.
2. Will depredation kills be enough to help keep the population in check?
3. If the prey base is documented as declining, the USFWS can, in the endangered area, provide some latitude to depredation kills.
4. It is very difficult to get reimbursed. The calves are used to dogs and are easy prey for wolves. The extent of losses has put some small livestock producers out of business. First hand anecdotal information supplied by Committee member.
5. Department of Livestock is working on a weight formula for documented cases.
6. Collars are helpful in identifying where packs are located in relation to herds.
7. Electric fences on cattle lots are helping.
8. Anecdote by Committee member – watched as a fawn was totally consumed in 5 minutes. Moose calves are being very hard hit. There is worry because the moose numbers are low to begin with.
9. Photos of wolves digging up hibernating bears.

**NEXT MEETING DATE: DECEMBER 3, 2008**

Minutes Approved:

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Mack Long, R2 Regional Supervisor

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Date