

Region 4 CAC Meeting Minutes August 27, 2008

FWP Staff – Gary Bertellotti, Fred Schultz, Steve Vinnedge, George Liknes, Graham Taylor, Bruce Auchly, Tom Stivers, and Cris Luby-Brown

CAC Members – Joe Schaffer, Judie Suden, Mike Labriola, Jodie Butler, Fred Davison, Karl Gies, Doug Deffe', Rocky Harber and Deanna Robbins

Public/Guests – Bryan Thies, Cascade; Ron Moody, Lewistown.

Gary opened the meeting and went over the agenda and asked if there were any additions to the agenda. A few agenda additions were brought up for discussion. Gary also introduced Karl Gies who is our new CAC member from the Lewistown area. Dennis Hanson from Chester is our other new member but he couldn't make it to this meeting for personal reasons.

General Topics for Discussion

Gary covered items of interest since our last meeting in June.

- DNRC leasing oil and gas rights. Federal leases on Front have been shut down. State leases are still open. FWP may get involved purchasing or trading oil and gas leases so that the front is not leased. It is a balance of what want or don't want. We are looking at critical areas for wildlife and habitat – not all leases would be affected. We have some oil and gas activity on the Blackleaf WMA. These wells sites are being rehabilitated. Being sealed and rehauled.
- Smith River – CAC for the Smith River was planning their final meeting to put the finishing touches on Smith River Management Plan. At their final meeting, August 21, this did not happen. Still discussing issues in which human waste management seems to be the biggest issue – taking out human waste versus the old system of pit toilets. The committee hopes to finalize the plan by October 08 and get it out to the public for comment.
- Wolf Delisting – We are back to where we started due to a court injunction – endangered in the NW part of the state and experimental in SW part of the state. Judge issued a temporary restraining order – there is no final order as of yet. This shuts down the proposed hunting season. Department is waiting for answers as to which way we will go as a management plan. Our FWP Website has a lot of information on the wolf process that is in affect now. As in the past when it comes to livestock depredation Wildlife Services will respond rather than the State. When wolves were delisted we took over that responsibility.

- Ackley Lake – The dam at Ackley is being repaired and during the drawdown of the lake the lake experienced a whirlpool. For safety reasons the lake was closed last Friday, August 22. It was closed to swimming until pool depth has been met. Should reopen to the public on Monday, August 25. Due to low water levels you can fish but you will not be able to launch a boat.
- Russian Flats Fire – During the fire the fire fighters/forest service used the Judith River WMA as a fire headquarters. Forest Service will pay us \$3800 to mediate damages to the game range. This season we have little fire mishaps. Forest Service and DNRC have responded very quickly to fires, which has kept the damage small.
- Property Issues – The Lincoln property on the Marias River by Shelby was finally put out for bid. That took nearly a year to happen. In Mr. Lincoln's will he gave the property to the Catholic Church Diocese in Helena with FWP having first right of refusal to any bid accepted. This property was never developed and has 14 miles of undisturbed Marias River bottoms. Initially the Church took closed bids with the highest bid being 4.75 million dollars. This was rejected by the Church and they opened the property up to a real estate process. The Church accepted a \$7.6 million offer. We have 30 days to meet the bid and another 30 days to pay. We have until September 5 to exercise our right. Some political issues have come up. State Parks and Habitat Montana dollars are involved. We have some third parties who are willing to get involved in the process but FWP must hold the fee title. The property would include a park and WMA. It is a very unique place.
- Neal Property – A ranch east of the Sun River WMA. The owner of the ranch approached us but the appraisal of the property is probably too high for us. We would be interested in some acres adjacent to the WMA.
- Moline Conservation Easement – this property is located NE of Geraldine. 5,000 deeded acres that butt up against DNRC/BLM land that would grant another 18,000 acres to access. The ranch will be maintained as an operating ranch and we would get access to all those DNRC/BLM lands. Easement would cost \$1.0 million. We would hope to use Canyon Ferry Trust funds with FWP dollars.
- Missouri River Fisheries Management Plan – Setting up a CAC type committee that will work on a management plan for fisheries for Canyon Ferry, Hauser and Holter reservoirs. We have selected a moderator for the committee and will be selecting members for the committee in September. Plan will be completed by 2010. Should be a lively discussion.
- Graham Taylor discussed the pending fruit crop in reference to bears this fall. Great Falls, Simms, Ft Shaw areas plus most of Cascade county are in bad shape as far as a berry crop goes this year due to snow storm and freeze this past spring. This time of the year bears rely heavily on fruits. Crops are much later this year compared to other years and lower elevations seem to be worse off than higher elevations. Bear activity in the region has been minimal as of late but should be interesting once bears start looking for food.

CAC Member Discussion Items:

- ❖ **Mike Labriola** – Had some concerns about Belt Creek fishery. He felt that a lot of folks are killing a lot of fish and he and a few of his fishing friends feel that the creek is too fragile for folks to be sustaining on fish from this creek. He is seeing a lot of development along the creek plus the creek runs adjacent to the road for easy access. He and his fishing friends would like to see limited take and more catch and release. George, fisheries manager replied. We used to plant catch able fish in the creek but that ceased in 1996. In the 60's sauger used to come up the creek all the way up to Armington. We did an estimate of fish in the creek around the Sluice Boxes we encountered rainbow trout up to 16 inches plus some trophy browns. Estimated some browns/brookies about 350 per mile. In the Monarch/Niehart area we are seeing an increase in cutthroat. In 2000 we did an estimate on Belt Creek from Carpenter Creek to Harley Creek. Found brookies, rainbow, and cutthroat in high density. That area experienced a fair amount of fishing pressure – 48-4900 angler days per year. Next opportunity to make a change in the regulations will be 2 years from now. Public can submit proposals to limit take to the regional office or Helena fisheries. Another survey would help. Karl Gies said he grow up there and there are a lot of local anglers that are bait fishermen. Not a lot of catch and release. Right now the limits are the standard limits for the Central Fishing District.
- ❖ **Mike Labriola** – Safety issue. Personal observation on Georgetown Lake – speed boats/personal water craft (pwc) versus float tubers and swimmers. He fears a tragic accident will occur with more popularity of pwc and just plan water recreation. He would like to see more review of lakes for no-wake zones on popular lakes. Lots of lakes in western Montana have more no-wake zones for safety reasons. The next Legislative session may consider looking at alcohol use and boating. Jodie Butler said she would contact Liz Lodman and Gary B. said he would talk to Ron Jendro on water safety issues.
- ❖ **Fred Davison** – Gave us an update on recreational program similar to our present block management program. Recreational being defined as other recreational opportunities on farms/ranches other than hunting and fishing opportunities. He discussed his interests with Representative Mike Milburn from Cascade. Looking at a program for more access to BLM land through private property. Several states have more recreation plans Montana does. A recreational program, outside hunting and fishing, could bring more revenue to rural areas. Like to see programs such as trails, bird watching, bike trails, etc. Liability is always a concern but state programs do help with liability.
- ❖ **Rocky Harber** – Brought up the subject – public land access versus private property. He feels this should be a topic for all CAC's throughout the state. Public resources versus private land access – not being addressed aggressively enough. Joe Schaffer stated that other states offer landowner licenses/permits so they offer more public access. Some of these programs are good, some bad. 35%

- of private land is occupied by elk but is not open to the public. Deanna Robbins mentioned that a “Montana Campaign” meeting in Bozeman put on by PERC is looking into access programs. She feels there needs to be incentives for landowners to open up their lands. There will be more workshops offered across the state and it may be a good idea for folks to attend one of these meetings. Gary said that he would research different incentive programs from other states and bring that info to our next CAC meeting.
- ❖ **Ron Moody (public attendee)** – Said the subject of public access versus private property has been discussed for years. PL/PW is looking into incentive licenses for landowners – are landowners being compensated fairly? One of the big problems is managing a public resource and access to private lands. Plus there is a changing character of ownership of our private lands by outside interests, which is increasing. He feels that a lot of landowners point to hunter behavior as a disincentive for landowners to open their lands. Proposals have been made for hunter behavior programs/hunter training. Jodie Butler stated that it is just not hunter behavior but fishermen, bird watcher behavior too. Deanna Robbins added that rather than address good hunters that we go after bad hunters, not all hunters in general or good hunters. Warden Sergeant Steve Vinnedge discussed enforcement issues dealing with fines and dealing with bad guys, etc.
 - ❖ **Deanna Robbins** – Asked about warden coverage for the Lewistown area since both our local wardens retired on July 31 this year. Steve V. stated that wardens out of Great Falls will cover the area and we will get some help from the surrounding regions also. We had one warden put in for one of the positions but if he gets it he may not move here until after the hunting season. A new recruit will most likely fill the other position.
 - ❖ **Jodie Butler** – Updated the committee on progress on the Thane Creek road in the Highwood Mountains. Contract has been let to do roadwork. The road has been surveyed and things are finally progressing. Work should be done by next spring. Jodie also asked about the CAC selection process. Fred explained the scoring process and how the two new members were selected. Members of the management staff and CAC members were all asked to score the seven applicants. Based on that scoring and ranking process new members were chosen.
 - ❖ **Joe Schaffer** – Joe had been approached by a few people about concerns of closing the loop for the River’s Edge Trail via the Sun River. George stated that the loop is in the flood plan so it probably won’t happen. Need to look at other options/right away issues.

NEXT MEETING: Scheduled for December 3, 2008. Looking at Ft Benton for the location. Fred will coordinate with Jodi Butler as to place and meal.

