

CAC Meeting 12-17-08

Present: Jim Satterfield, Jim Williams, Dave Landstrom, Leo Rosenthal, Kent Laudon, Martha Abbrescia, Alan Wood, Jon Obst, John Fraley, Bob, Friedman, Don Clark, Tony Anderson, Brent Mitchell, Jon Dahlberg, Darrell Coverdell, Chuck Williams, and Mike Feldmann.

Swan Lake Fisheries Project – Leo Rosenthal

- Update on lake trout research and proposed removal efforts
- History of lake trout problem
- Work completed to date
- Future Plans

Swan Lake is one of most popular bull trout fisheries. In 1998, a 29" lake trout was caught and reported and was the first that we knew that there were lake trout in the Swan drainage. There are currently 6 agencies working on this project and have formed a working group that determined that if lake trout are left unchecked, lake trout will dominate Swan Lake. The Swan river system is a connected system, so lake trout could end up in Holland Lake and Lindbergh Lake as well. This project began as a MSU student project to determine population estimates, size and structure. In 2007, Professional gill-netters were contracted "Harbor Fisheries". Netting began in a stratified random sampling (deeper-water). In 2007, over 2100 lake trout were captured and successfully marked and about were released 1400 lake trout however, few were recaptured. There was no explanation as to why we were not recapturing these fish.

How depletion estimates work? Catch per unit effort calculated against cumulative catch.

In 2008, approximately 3700 lake trout were removed from 9-9-08 to 9-25-08. 400-600 lbs were donated to wildlife rehab and approx 2000 lbs of cleaned fish was donated to local food banks.

By catch on bull trout was minimized by the timing and placement of the nets, only approx 240 bull trout were captured.

Where do we go from here? The plan is to continue for another three years on this removal effort. Now, Leo is coming up with EA that will likely be released this spring. Removal will include both sub-adult and adult lake trout populations. This is still going to be an experimental approach. We will evaluate to see if this approach is the one that we want to continue or take another route.

Lake Five, McGregor Lake Access – Dave Landstrom

Lake Five – Update – nearing the end of the public comment period for the second draft EA – 12-22-08. Get comment in if you have any thought on that project. There are three alternatives in this EA, one is No action and the other

two are both on L5. One parcel is the land that FWP owns (Alternative B) and the other is a possible swap adjacent to the current resort 9 Alternative A). There is a scoring matrix as to which one makes the most sense to develop. We have held two public hearings, one in Hungry horse on 12-03 and the other at FWP on 12-10. We have so far received a really good mix of comment for both anglers and from landowners. It seems as though the two groups are now starting to talk to one another. It may be a good time to put together a working group to work out the details on this contentious lake.

McGregor Lake – there is a small 5 acre development that has been sold and one of the lot owners have built their home on the old county road that has never been abandoned. Flathead county has now sent a letter to the owners telling them that they have 30-days to remove the obstructions (move the homes, or rebuild the road through the parcels in a suitable manner.) More will follow. The owners did in fact already build a road that dips behind their lots and then has a 20% grade down to the FWP parcel; which is virtually impossible to traverse in winter conditions when ice fishing is popular.

Northshore of Flathead Lake – there is now 160 more acres of public land on Flathead Lake. Works starts next week on an interim plan regarding how we're going to manage that....WMA or State Park or both?

Wolf Issues & Hunting Season Wrap up – Jim Williams & Kent Laudon
(hands out MT Legacy books to all CAC members)

Some folks want EVERY wolf killed – eradicate them. Other folks do not want one individual wolf harmed.

The recent media coverage has definitely been a whirlwind.

The Hog Heaven Pack (27 wolves including 15 pups to feed.) – depredation started last year – one wolf was removed and that in connection with the end of the grazing season seemed to remedy the problem at that time. West of Brown's meadow to Upper Little Thompson drainage was their home range. Seven depredation events involving both cattle and llamas from roughly August through October. During that time, we collared and released one animal to maintain a collar in the pack and we killed incrementally 8 wolves in 4 different control actions as a response to those 7 depredations. Then the pack killed a two-year old bull, which is a pretty large animal, making this the 8th depredation, so the decision was to get more aggressive with the lethal removal. After quite a bit of thought and discussion, the decision was to remove the rest of this pack. Once this decision was made, 10 wolves were killed in the first three days; one of these was a collared wolf. FWP had previously collared a wolf that had went down to the Little Thompson area so we thought she had disperse, meanwhile she came back and rejoined this pack along with the other one that we had just collared. The remaining collared wolf would be removed the next day and any wolf that was with him. The next day, the last collared wolf was with 8 other wolves and they were all lethally removed to complete the Hog Heaven lethal removal.

Wolf survey takes all year long since flying is not available everyday. Tracking becomes easier during the last two months of the year when the snow is on the ground and pups are traveling with the pack. FWP has a high level of confidence that we have detected the majority of these animals by the end of this January.

As an example, while the Hog Heaven pack control was happening, Kent was doing monitoring flights and observed 20 wolves in the Whitefish Pack and that was the first time that many wolves had been seen in that pack.

Questions started to arise regarding human safety while in wolf habitat....

Certainly, a wolf (wolves) attack could occur. It a numbers game, the chances are low but as the wolf population increases so does the chance of getting attacked. The overall odds of this happening are quite low. Your chance of getting attacked by a wolf is close to 0, but it's not 0. Your chance of getting attacked by a moose is higher than by wolves. The one caveat is dogs.... so, if you happen to be out in the woods with your dog of any kind, the confrontation could be so intense that a person could definitely get hurt during this type of encounter. Wolves are highly territorial with other canids and would look at domestic dogs as trespassers and may attack. Wolves become so focused on these domestic dogs that they loose focus on the people that may be present

Round Table:

Question s continued regarding human safety with wolves:

Brent Mitchell: If you're worried about wolves – start examining dogs in their day-to-day behavior. If you had wolves that are coming around you in the open and they have their heads down would you be uncomfortable? I don't care if they are Labradors or wolves – I'm going to be uncomfortable. Remember that wolves have quite a few of the same behaviors as domestic dogs...when encountering a wolf – try to “read” the animal.

Darrell Coverdell: If the food source diminishes – would there then be...greater dangers for wolves – would that change the equation? If wolves are desperate – they're going to find what they need to eat – be it dogs, cats, etc....

If the pack starts running low on food will the pack disburse? Yes, often times. Inner-pack strife starts to happen and some members are run off.

Tony Anderson: The other side of this issue – is the mentality of the hunters that are out in the field today. There are hunters that are absolutely fed up with wolves. Some have seen this trend and it's getting out of hand. Some folks are talking in a way that others would never expect folks to hear. This agency needs to do something immediately to better educate the mentality of folks and make them understand that FWP does not control the wolves. They're sick of being told by the Feds what they can and can't do. Nobody is crying about lions, because they feel that they are under control. People do not understand the

situation and the players involved, not only the Feds but also the ruling by the judge. They also need to understand what role FWP does play – what is the authority of FWP as it pertains to wolves? If something is not done quickly, there are going to be a lot of carcasses out there due to this “mob” mentality. They have to take their vengeance out on something. This “mob” thinks that FWP and every other agency is lying about the numbers of the wolves. The “Shoot, Shovel & Shut-Up” Club is growing to significant numbers including folks that would otherwise be law-abiding citizens.

Part of the problem is that the Feds may be sued again and we most likely will not have a hunting season for wolves next year either.

We have to rely on the best data that we have. Kent is going to continue to focus on monitoring.

For years people have been saying that there are more wolves out there that FWP knows.

The south fork project was stirred up a few years ago and FWP went out and educated them and now we do not hear much about the rotenone project. Something similar must happen with the wolf issue. Need a marketing plan to make this happen. Example: instead of saying “we just don’t know the number of the wolves” instead say “based on the studies the wolf numbers are.....”

Administrative

- Members that are terming out – we are asking you stay on through May. Those members are:
 - Tony Anderson, Jon Dahlberg, Michael Feldmann, Jim Morey, Mark Sheets, and Justin Sliter.

Next meeting will be 1-21-09

Suggestion for Round Table – keep it in the meeting, spend time on it and start each meeting by wrapping up any and all loose ends of prior meeting and delivering answers to any questions of last meeting.