MINUTES
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks UGBEPAC Meeting
Hampton Inn - 3000 Hwy. 12 East
Helena, MT

July 7 – 8, 2009 (Meeting 1)

Advisory Council Members Present: Rep. Julie French, Chairwoman, Sen. Jim Shockley, Mike Begley, Jay Gore, Bernie Hart, Gordon Haugen, Bill Howell, Mike Jensen, Joe Perry, Craig Roberts, Dale Tribby.

Fish, Wildlife & Parks Staff Present: Director Joe Maurier, Legislative Audit Division Staff, FWP Staff.

Guests: Ed Smith, Dagmar

1. **Opening.** Chairwoman French called the meeting to order at 8:00 am.

2. **Welcome from Director Joe Maurier.**
   The Director thanked everybody for their commitment to the council. He emphasized that the council's primary task is to advise the department with the development and maintenance of a 10-year UGBEP strategic plan. In addition, the council will provide an annual evaluation of the UGBEP activities. Director Maurier stated that the program has recently undergone a legislative audit with several programmatic changes noted. Further, the 2009 Legislation session made statutory changes to the UGBEP by removing the 15% maximum administrative cap and the formation of a 12-member advisory council. The department is actively considering the hiring of 3 UGB biologists to serve the Conrad, Miles City, and Plentywood areas.

3. **Housekeeping.** Chairwoman French and Debbie Hohler, Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program Coordinator, went over FWP per diem forms. Please complete these forms and return to Debbie before you leave the final day of each meeting.

4. **Introductions.** The Council formally introduced themselves and described what they hope to accomplish as a member of the council. Members also shared their

personal perspectives on hunting and whether they have dogs (or not)! FWP staff also introduced themselves and offered their perspectives on the UGBEP.

5. **Message from Chairwoman French.**
   Chairwoman French welcomed everybody to the meeting and emphasized the need for the Council to become familiar with HB 499, the 2009 Legislative Audit, and current ARM rules as they pertain to the UGBEP.

6. **UGBEP Overview: History, Current Status and Structure.**
   Rick Northrup, Game Bird Coordinator, gave a comprehensive presentation that included: legislative history; a brief on audits; previous councils; project accomplishments by type and region; an overview of program scope, including project types – biological basis and summary of projects completed to date; and historical approach to project initiation (generally passive). A general Council discussion followed.

7. **Discussion on Sheridan County.**
   Chairwoman French asked if a strategic placement of a new biologist that Dir. Maurier mentioned could help the program and the area. The department's response was "yes." Currently, the department has an MOU with Sheridan County to develop UGBHEP – namely, food plots. Scott Thompson, FWP biologist, helps with coordination of this MOU.

8. **Revenue and Expenditure History, Current Funding Obligations, and Program Balance.**
   Sue Daly, Chief of Finance, reviewed the UGBEP budget, describing the differences between capital budgets, annual revenue, spending authority, and related expenditures. Sue reported that the department recognized the need to get more people on the ground to do projects. HB 499 addressed this need by removing the 15% administrative cap. Sue summarized the UGBEP budget by stating there is 3 million dollars in the bank. Discussion followed on the current availability of these dollars. Sue also pointed out that the 3 million dollars are carry-over dollars built up over time, but the program needs to be built on annual revenue. If the council comes up with a proposal to spend more money, the department will have to work with the governor's office before the request goes to the next legislature.

- HB 2: Funds administrative balance – an annual appropriation (does *not* roll forward).

- HB 5: Funds habitat, bird planting – a continuation appropriation (does roll forward).

9. UGBEP Legislative Audit Report.

Joe Murray, Legislative Audit Division, gave a presentation on the 2009 performance audit. Four key recommendations to the department were discussed:

- Revisit the 15% funding allocation that can be used for designated administrative duties found in 87-1-247(1) MCA.
- Develop an Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program management plan that guides the long-term vision of the program, which is driven by specific goals, quantifiable objectives, and results-oriented performance measures.
- Create an Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program advisory council to assist in management planning and to provide a review mechanism for assessing whether program goals and objectives are being accomplished.
- Take steps to correct existing database information to assure data is complete and accurate as required in the work plan for the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program biologist; establish controls to assure database information is complete and accurate; and assure program information is accessible at the regional level.

10. Strategic Plans and Their Use by FWP.

Quentin Kujala, Wildlife Management Section Chief, discussed FWP's implementation of strategic plans in species-specific management plans. Several examples were described to the council, including the Montana's Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Management, Montana Bighorn Sheep Conservation Strategy, and the Montana Wolf Conservation and Management Planning Document. For the UGBEP strategic plan, the development process will include council recommendations, other public processes, department development, and possible commission endorsement.

11. Current Program Opportunities and Program Direction.

- Ken McDonald, Wildlife Bureau Chief, informed the council that through the legislative process, the administrative cap was removed from the UGBEP allowing for new opportunities to fund 3 FTEs dedicated to UGB habitat planning and development. The department proposed that these positions will be located in Plentywood (R6), Conrad (R4), and Miles City (R7). Ken McDonald recommended having a council member on hiring council. The department sought the council's endorsement for these positions.

Action: Sen. Shockley moved and Jay Gore seconded the motion to endorse council approval to hire 3 FTE Upland Game Bird Biologists. Motion carried.

- The department has been exploring a new use for UGBHEP dollars to provide additional monetary incentive to people who are eligible to extend their CRP contracts with FSA. The UGBHEP would provide an additional payment to landowners based on CRP stand quality, hunting opportunity, and whether any enhancement practices (light tillage and disking) would be employed. Minimum acreage for enrollment was established at 80 acres. The department sought the council's endorsement for using UGBHEP dollars for this add-on payment.

Action: Bill Howell moved and Gordon Haugen seconded the motion to endorse council approval to hire use UGBHEP dollars for CRP add-on payments.

Craig Roberts questioned change in acre size – other counties may have good CRP, and a habitat assessment needs to be conducted. Dale Tribby stated a question is being called.

Action on Motion: Motion carried.

12. UGBEP Strategic Planning Topics – Review A "Straw Pheasant" Outline.

Jeff Herbert, Assistant Wildlife Bureau Chief, led a discussion on how to tackle the council's task: to provide the department with their recommendations for a 10-year strategic plan. Refer to Jeff's handout. Council discussion followed.

- Consider that we will likely need 2 months for public comment and any commission approval or endorsement.
- Rep. French stated that a finalized plan may not be done, but a report needs to be addressed to the 2011 Legislative session.

- The department will provide the council with a draft strategic plan outline for comments and input.

13. The Process Leading to a Plan.

Marc Scow, Facilitator, and Rep. French worked with the council to identify discussion points for strategic plan development.

- Mission statement.
- Species prioritizations.
- Integration with other programs (state, federal, and non-profits).
- Project types and strategies.
- Evaluation/performance measures.
- Oversight and monitoring.
- Recordkeeping: simple and effective.
- Financial accountability.
- Communication: with landowner, other agencies, hunters, and general public.
- Cooperation with other State and Federal Agencies.
- Maintenance agreements.

Goals and objectives can be broad and specific to ecoregions.

Jay Gore offered a goal statement:

> *"A goal for Montana's Management Plan is to ensure healthy, viable, upland game bird habitat and population on land, private and public, and provide public access."*

Jay Gore offered another goal statement with a Farm Bill provision:

> *"A goal is to support and encourage maintenance and funding of a strong, viable Federal Farm program that provides for upland game birds, i.e., CRP, swamp-buster, sod-buster, etc."*

A general discussion on issues followed, with emphasis on landowner cost-share (program requirement as of 2001).

Scheduling: Rep. French stated that when a draft plan is in play, a visit with the commission would be necessary. At the appropriate time, the department will schedule a meeting through a work session.

Field Trips: Will be done in September and October (council does not plan to meet November and December). Council will tour successful and unsuccessful projects.

Technical Assistance: The council requested that technical assistance be made available from FSA, DNRC, and NRCS. The department has complied by extending an invitation to Matt Walker, NRCS Area Biologist (Great Falls), and Clive Rooney, DNRC Area Manager (Lewistown). Matt and Clive will be ex-officio members of the UGBEP Advisory Council.

Next meeting: September 23 and 24 in Lewistown. Another council meeting has been scheduled October 21 and 22 in Plentywood, Montana. Impetus is to meet non-resident hunters.

Rep. French adjourned the meeting at 11:30.

Public Comments

Ed Smith, former State Senator from Dagmar, MT, provided the council with his insight and knowledge of the program – a unique position that spans well over 22 years. As the primary sponsor of the 1987 "Pheasant Enhancement Program," Mr. Smith has remained dedicated and diligent over the years to ensure program success. Mr. Smith expressed encouragement over the council's and department's comments, emphasizing the need for continued productive and open communication. Mr. Smith stressed the need for accountability – both financially and the way the program is implemented. Details of Mr. Smith's discussion and concerns include:

- Monitoring compliance
- Signage
- Communication with landowner and FWP
- Database inadequacy
- Lack of project prioritization
- Lack of 25% cost-share
- Improved accountability

A general council discussion followed.