

Region 5 Citizen Advisory Council Meeting Agenda

12/9/2009 5:30 PM to 9:30 PM Fish, Wildlife & Parks 2300 Lake Elmo Drive Billings, MT 59105

Meeting called by: Bob Gibson

Type of meeting: CAC Council Meeting Location: FWP HQ Public Meeting Room

Facilitator: Bob Gibson Note taker: Dianne Stiff

Attendees: Robert Willems, Doug Haacke, Mike Whittington, Dan Dutton, Dale Vermillion, Shawn Todd, Harold Guse, Bob Gibson, David Charles, Doug Dreezsen,

Gregory Keller, Ken Frazer, Dianne Stiff, Alan Charles and Scott Story Absent: Gary Hammond, Ray Mule', Jed Evjene & Daniel Aadland

Agenda topics

5:30-6:30 p.m.	Welcome, Dinner & Conversation	Bob Gibson
6:30-7:00 p.m.	Issues of Concern	CAC Members
7:00-8:00 p.m. 8:00-8:15 p.m.	Crucial Areas/Connectivity Assessment Hunter/Landowner Stewardship Project	Scott Story Alan Charles
8:15-9:00 p.m.	Systematic Planning for the Bighorn River System	Doug Haacke
9:00-9:15 p.m.	Housekeeping & Future Meetings & Adjourn	Bob Gibson

Issues of Concern CAC Members

Discussion:

David Charles – A good hunting season; didn't hear a lot of complaints. Petitions driving on initiatives may create some controversy. There is a positive reaction to the wolf season. Have heard concerns of increased traffic on the new road in the Yellowstone Wildlife Management with less hiking or walking. There may be some issues coming up with season proposals.

Doug Dreezsen – It's a road hunter's paradise on Yellowstone WMA with the new road. An item came up recently when taking meat down to a local meat processor. They asked for the deer tag. Harold clarified that the tag stays with the major portion of the meat. Another issue that Doug brought up is the potential of identity theft since your ALS number has your date of birth on the tag. On the KTVQ-2 news there was something about FWP buying a park or something at Lockwood school? Bob answered – the school district applied for and was awarded a federal grant that is administered by FWP to improve their school grounds. It's a land and water conservation fund that provides the federal money, but there has to be an administering agency, which in this case is FWP. Montana Stockgrowers Association was interviewed by Q2 regarding approaching FWP about making the last two weeks of the season doe only. So far nothing is on the FWP commission's agenda regarding this. Being involved with the Wild Sheep Foundation in Montana, there is still a real concern regarding the sacrifice of a bighorn sheep ram during a case investigation.

Greg Keller – Hunting season went well with 13 elk taken off his place, but across the fence are 400 more elk where no hunting is allowed. There are two new power plants being proposed to go into the West and East Rosebud. Ken Frazer is working on a FWP response regarding this proposal. An initial perk application needs to be completed. The Forest Service is looking at a preliminary application to allow them to even start doing any work. The permit only allows them to do a feasibility study. We have received several comments from the local residents plus the Forest Service has already filed to intervene. From what we've seen, we won't have any favorable input on it either. Hopefully it will not go beyond this point.

Robert Willems – It was tough hunting around Harlowton with two ranches west of Harlowton not open for hunting. The deer numbers were down through most of the season. Cooney ranch south of Harlowton didn't allow any mule deer hunting. Seemed that the hunter numbers were down this year but were putting more miles on their vehicles. Bob asks hunters to keep him posted as far as what they see, don't see and what they expect, but no one called him back. Wolf problems continue west of their ranch.

Doug Haacke –Added that the Northern Plains Resource Council is also going to intervene on the East and West Rosebud proposed project too. Positive comments on the wolf season. It's a real feather in FWP's cap this year and for the public too. The hunters and everyone did a great job with a lot of good publicity. Will get the word to Carolyn Sime too.

Mike Whittington – As far as the Yellowstone Wildlife Management Area, there is plenty of opportunity to walk. When you get off the road, you don't see anybody. There is an issue that some of the sportsman's groups are keeping an eye on including the Rod and Gun Club and Montana Wildlife Federation. There may be an initiative on the next ballot to outlaw trapping in Montana. What Mike has heard from some of his colleagues with Montana Wildlife Federation is there's a group of folks out of Superior who initiated this. Some of these folks have a quite a record of being anti-hunting as well. Mike introduced John Hughs to discuss this proposed initiative with the CAC group. John Hughs is a fourth generation rancher from between Grass Range and Winnett about 80 miles north of Billings. He has ranched all his life and trapped 40+ years. He's representing Montanan's for Effective Wildlife Use, which is a valid initiative committee formed by the MT Trapper's Association to oppose I160. He handed information out to the committee. I160 may not be on the ballot next fall, but signatures are being gathered right now. The Montana's for Effective Wildlife Use feel they will secure enough signatures so that is why they are getting this information out to groups and associations throughout Montana.

Dan Dutton – Positive feedback from people in his area on how the wolf hunt was managed. He's in the block management and had a good year with a third of the people being new and several kids who came out to hunt for the first time. Seems to be an increase on waterfowl hunters. Appears that the population of both whitetail and mule deer are down.

Dale Vermillion – They have seen several cougars taking deer close to their home in Sweet Grass County. Back in 2002 they applied for an instream water lease similar to irrigation rights mostly because Sweet Grass Creek becomes completely dewatered for the public. They have the oldest water right on the place and happen to be at the bottom of Sweet Grass Creek. After 7 years they finally got a hearing. All the objections to the instream lease were prevailed on but the hearing officer said that they had been unable to document water use on their place historically prior to 1973.

Shawn Todd – Positive feedback on the wolf hunting season this fall, and appears numbers of turkeys are up in the Roundup area.

Action items: Monitor new road at Yellowstone WMA; provide	Person responsible: Ray	Deadline:
members with update on the power plan proposal.	Mule' & Ken Frazer	Ongoing

Crucial Areas Assessment and Mapping Service (Connectivity Assessment)

Scott Story

Discussion: FWP Mission Statement - Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, through its employees and citizen commission, provides for the stewardship of the fish, wildlife, parks, and recreational resources of Montana, while contributing to the quality of life for present and future generations.

What it is -

Three pronged strategy – gathering the data and getting into a mode that can be delivered easily, developing management guidelines for the classes of importance that we decide, and also it's creating a culture in FWP of turning to this data for our planning activities plus getting other folks to adopt it.

Statewide effort & geographic based

Reflects best available fish and wildlife data/expert knowledge

Effort does not replace FWP Field Biologist review

Assessment is non-regulatory

Final product web based mapping service

Drivers -

Consistent and growing demand for spatial information

Western Governor's Initiative – directed at regional scale identification of "crucial habitat" and "important wildlife (fish) corridors" in the face of significant land use changes in the west

Comprehensive Fish & Wildlife Conservation Strategy Implementation – goes into detail on the species of greatest conservation need.

Not inclusive of terrestrial game and sport fish, FWP lands and other recreational values Scale not suitable in many cases for project level planning

Goals -

Proactive - support existing environmental review processes; to help with environmental planning and project proposals

Prioritize Montana's aquatic and terrestrial landscapes on appropriate scales

Increase efficiency and transparency

Make resource information readily available to FWP and external users

The Assessment - a flow diagram was shown

Assessment Timeframe

Project initiated January 2008

Internal and external scoping completed September 2008

Data collection, layer development and review, mapping service – near completion

The Process – Fish and Wildlife Data Management ------GIS (Spatial Data) geographic information systems------Assessment------Web Delivery Tools

What is GIS?

Layers of information on top of one of another

The Process -

Aquatic and Terrestrial Species Data

Took those individual data layers, summarized and ranked them

Four-tiered Crucial Areas Assessment will provide a graduated scale of importance from highest to lowest

Approach - Aquatic

Layers:

Sport Fish – 43 species – size abundance tiered

Species of concern – 19 species state rank

Life History Support – essential/important categories for spawning, rearing, thermal refugia

Watershed Integrity/Native Assemblages – 29 native species

Approach – Terrestrial

Layers:

Game Species – 12 species – distribution, habitat value

Species of Concern – 77 species – predicted occurrence

Species Habitat Associations – 366 species (breeding and/or year round) – species richness

Approach – Habitat

Layers:

Landscape Metrics – large intact landscapes

Riparian – total riparian area

Wetland – total wetland area

Why combine the layers?

Broadens and expands species and habitat types used during fish and wildlife review

Provides FWP interpretation

Reduces visual confusion when comparing separate layers

Allows FWP to compare

Connectivity and Corridors – a big piece that is still missing; soon will be incorporating

Public and Constituent Feedback –

Gotten a lot of positive feedback

Last Steps

"Soft roll-out"

Mapping service available internally to our staff any day now

Rolling it out to the public by February or March 2010

Communication strategy by Comm-Ed

A live demonstration was given of this mapping service.

Doug Haacke – Any of the data sets available for download just as data? Scott – I think so; some of it we are bound by internal rules like sage grouse leks for example. Is the data better on public land rather than private for terrestrials? Scott – If we have point data, you are right, some of our data is heavier on public land or our WMA's.

Any other questions or comments, please contact Scott.

Action items: Scott's e-mail address: sstory@mt.gov	Person responsible:	Deadline:
	Scott Story	Ongoing

Hunter/Landowner Stewardship Project

Alan Charles

Discussion:

One of the recommendations that came from the Private Land Public Wildlife Council and previously from the Hunter Behavior Advisory Council that the Department needs to do more to help promote responsible hunter behavior and help promote better hunter/landowner relations. FWP certainly agrees.

Thomas Baumeister and he have worked with a group of hunters and landowners during the last six months to develop an informational program on our FWP website. This is an interactive program that provides live video clips presenting informational or situational dilemmas and a series of questions. It's designed to be fun and educational for both landowners and hunters.

Goals

- -promote better understanding of the common ground and different perspectives shared by landowners and hunters
- -promote better understanding among hunters and landowners about what constitutes acceptable hunter behavior
- -providing hunters and landowners with information about how to develop and maintain good relationships
- -providing information about the shared experience about landowners and hunters in various hunting situations.

Alan went through this online program briefly and indicated that this can be taken at your own pace. Upon completion, you can print a certificate of completion, and the final part is completion of a survey.

Ouestion -

Doug Haacke – Any talk of expanding this to anglers too?

Alan Charles -The potential is enormous, and Alan hopes the Department and nongovernment entities such as Wildlife Federation, Trout Unlimited, etc., can either build their own or add onto it. FWP has the responsibility to do much more than we have done, but in some ways we can facilitate other people taking it on and doing more as well.

Doug Dreeszen - Can you make it mandatory for new residents moving to Montana from out of state?

Alan Charles - It may become mandatory in the future, but down the road could be printed out on your hunting license that you have completed as it's tied to the ALS, and it could have endorsement that you have participated. A lot of things could happen. This is just the first step.

Mike Whittington – Applauds the effort. There are lots of possibilities for carrying it further. I'd like to see landowners who care encouraged to actually require this of the hunters who hunt on their place.

Dan Dutton – Is this something that would be introduced to those taking the hunter education program so they are aware of this optional program?

Alan Charles – That is certainly the intent.

Shawn Todd – Are you sending something out to the hunter education instructors?

Alan Charles and Thomas Baumeister will be promoting this as much as they can.

Gregory Keller – Any information for the new landowners?

The "Owning Eden" video. Possibility of building a link to real estate folks.

on items: Further question/comments, e-mail acharles@mt.gov Person responsible:		e:	Deadline:
	Alan Charles		Ongoing
Systematic Diaming for the Dichem System		Dana Haaal	

Systematic Planning for the Bighorn System

Doug Haacke

Discussion:

Doug did a recap on what the issue is, what happened in 2009 and how we are moving forward.

- On a typical day in July on the Bighorn River comparing to the typical day on Bighorn Lake there are not very many people at Horseshoe Bend on the south end of the lake in Wyoming. The pictures shown were taken at the same exact time.
- The boat launch at Horseshoe Bend is less than 24 feet of silt which is 4000 tons of sediment dumping into that south end of the lake every single day of the year. It requires the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) to maintain higher lake levels every year to support launching boats at this location.
- The BOR doesn't like the lake level to get above 3640 feet lake elevation as anything above that is considered an exclusive flood pool. Once the lake elevation is in the flood pool the Corp of Engineers takes over management, but not necessarily the case in the last couple of years.

- Doug presented hydrographs showing how the BOR has gone from historically lower lake levels in anticipation of melting mountain snowpack to maintaining higher lake levels within the last two years. In addition, he showed how the river releases for most of 2008 were less than 2500 cfs and instead of a gradual ramp up in flows there was real dramatic flow increases. Went from 1750 cfs to 11,000 cfs within a two week period at one point. Not a lot of damage during this time, but people cancelled trips.
- In 2009 we started with below normal river release of 2450 cfs. and a record reservoir storage of 3,639 lake elevation. Even with the snowpack that was 118% above normal at one point the lake remained at a high lake elevation, so when the snowpack began to melt the lake filled so high that at one point the river flows were at 14,000 cfs. That did some damage changing the river rather dramatically, wiped out Grant Marsh FAS, and we lost 6 ½ weeks of tourist industry in Fort Smith because of cancellations.
- What can we expect for the spring of 2010? We expect to be at least an average water year. There is normal snowpack right now. We have started with near record storage, 3,639.29 feet as of October 1, 2009. This year we are starting with a fairly decent river release which is continuing to be maintained. Doug predicts we will be in the same pattern we've been in for the last two years with a famine in terms of water down the river and then really high flows.

Events of interest –

- Last March Dan Jewell, Bureau of Reclamation, wanted to manage river in a 20 foot window keeping the lake level at 3620 and 3640 feet.
- Then in July Yellowtail Afterbay Gate Control System malfunctions, flows drop from 4,000 cfs down to zero in a matter of minutes.
- October BOR scheduled a maintenance drawdown on the river working with Ken Frazer, FWP fisheries manager, going from 3400 cfs down to 400 cfs for a short while. What actually happened is flows increased up to 4400 cfs and then within 30 minutes the flows went from 1200 cfs to as low as 280 cfs. Fish were stranded and lost. Senator Baucus calls for a Department of Interior Inspector General investigation. There are two investigations ongoing at this time.

Reclamation studies -

- Yellowtail Dam Reallocation
- Sediment Management
- Bighorn River Side-Channel

Strategies -

- Develop and enhance partnerships FWP, Trout Unlimited, MT Trout Unlimited, Magic City Fly Fishers, MT Wildlife Federation, Bighorn River Alliance, Crow Tribe, etc.
- Maintain communications with advocates up to date website (bighornriver.org) that has current river updates and graphs, send out e-mails and newspaper exposure whenever possible
- Reach a consensus on a clear and achievable strategy and implement it
- Be a player and not a spectator
- Use partnerships and knowledge gained to formulate solutions.

Special Thanks ----- Ken Frazer, Bob Gibson, Gary Hammond and the staff of FWP for their commitment and dedication to the resources in Region 5!

Action items: Up to date information – bighornriver.org	Person responsible: De		Deadline:
	Doug Haacke		Ongoing
Housekeeping & Future Meetings & Adjourn		Bob Gibson	
Discussion: Agenda ideas - informational presentation on the upcoming initiatives that the CAC would have an interest in. A report on the big game regulations and the adopted changes. Next meeting – March 10, 2010.			
Action items: Presentations and agenda for next meeting.	Person responsible: Deadline:		Deadline:
	Bob Gibson		March 1, 2010