

**MINUTES**  
**Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks UGBEPAC Meeting**  
**Wingate Inn**  
**Helena, MT**

**January 20, 2009 (Meeting 4)**

**Advisory Council Members Present:** Terry Comstock, Jay Gore, Bernie Hart, Gordon Haugen, Bill Howell, Mike Jensen, Joe Perry, Craig Roberts, Clive Rooney, Sen. Shockley, Dale Tribby.

**Fish, Wildlife & Parks Staff Present:** Caryn Amacher, Ashley Beyer, Jeff Herbert, Debbie Hohler, Quentin Kujala, Ken McDonald, Rick Northrup.

1. **Opening.** Senator Shockley called the meeting to order at 8:00 am.
2. **Meeting focus.** The meeting focus was on strategic plan development with discussions focused on program implementation for upland bird releases and habitat enhancement.

**Minutes from January 20, 2010 were approved .**

*Action: Joe Perry moved and Jay Gore seconded the motion to accept minutes. Motion carried.*

3. A presentation was given by Debbie Hohler on upland game bird licenses by type; itemized expenditures for the 2009 pheasant releases; and active habitat project commitments.
  - a. A concern was expressed that turkey licenses do not contribute to the UGBEP. (*Tribby*) Discussion followed.
4. Caryn Amacher gave a presentation on UGBEP revenue and expenditures. Caryn offered a snapshot of current annual expenditures: After funds are disbursed for upland game bird releases; emergency supplemental feeding (if warranted); and administrative costs (3 new UGB Habitat Biologists and 1 Program Biologist); the remaining unspent annual balance will be approximately \$238,000. This balance does not take into account proposed habitat projects that are generated annually. At this time (January 2010), there is \$16,000 in the 2010

Upland Game Bird Release fund, which also funds any potential emergency supplemental feeding. The UGBEP account has a little over \$3 million in the account. With nearly \$1 million in committed costs, the remaining balance of unspent funds is \$2 million. The Council was asked for their consideration on the how to view this unspent balance.

- a. The \$2 million budget needs to be spent wisely (*Sen. Shockley*); should not set up a process where the department overspends (*Perry*).
  - b. Unspent funds should be used through the efforts of the new UGB Habitat Biologists. (*Gore*)
  - c. NRCS sent back unspent funds last year (approximately \$90,000 WHIP). NRCS funds will help leverage UGBHEP dollars. (*Northrup*)
5. FWP updated the Council on the new proposed Conservation Easements that would be partially funded by the UGBHEP: Christensen Bend and the South Glasgow project.
  6. The 2 Farming positions and 2 Habitat Forever MOU were discussed by the Council.
  7. Council held discussions on marking released pheasants.
  8. Mike Jensen handed out harvest stats for Sheridan County and would like Council feedback.
  9. **Council began preliminary discussions on recommendations for UGBHEP Contracts.**
    - a. Council discussed recording of UGBHEP project contracts. Sen. Shockley pointed out that the 2003 contract is adequate to record but also acknowledged that other points of view on contract “recordability” has merit for consideration.
    - b. FWP staff responded that smaller, annual contracts would not need to be recorded – if contract is in default, the cooperator would not be paid.
    - c. Larger, more expensive projects obviously need to be recorded. The department seeks Council recommendations for those “in-between” contracts.
    - d. Contracts should not be so ironclad that landowners would find them onerous. Contracts come with these kinds of challenges. (*Perry*)

- e. Contract Type: Council needs to recognize that agencies also enter into agreements. DNRC will sign UGBHEP contracts, but BLM will not.
10. Council reviewed and discussed unresolved items highlighted in the strategic plan outline. Items covered include program implementation on public and private land, cost-share requirements, pheasant releases, and supplemental feeding. FWP will provide the council with an updated strategic plan outline that incorporates Council recommendations for future review.
  11. Gordon Haugen and Clive Rooney updated the Council with the meeting held on the State Lands Proposal. There are 3 options that could help facilitate UGBHEP on State Lands:
    - a. A perpetual conservation easement can be done on State Lands. An easement cost is equivalent to 100% fair market value.
    - b. Land Use License: The license may be held for a maximum period of 10 years, with the ability to request renewal for an additional 10 years.
    - c. Establishment of a working relationship between PF, DNRC, FWP, and others for standard conservation practices.
      - MOU is appropriate.
      - Compensation is not required as long as there is no impediment to land production.
      - Dense nesting cover is not considered an agricultural practice.
  12. **Public Comment period.**
    - a. Pat Howe, Headwaters Chapter of Pheasant Forever:
      - As a sportsman, asks the Council to recognize statute, but to phase out the Release Program. Emphasis should be on habitat.
      - Hopes to see increase of habitat work with the recently hired UGB Habitat Biologists.
      - Expressed a need for a directive addressing work done on public land.
      - Recognized that bird hunters provide an economic benefit – for example, Plentywood.
      - Shelterbelts are important, but CRP is nearly worthless. Recommends reworking CRP.
      - A good program focus for the UGBHEP is on Block Management.
    - b. Randy Pearson, Helena Valley Gun Dog Club:

- Planting birds is a waste of money, but he recognizes political and economic pressure from Plentywood.
- Recommends changes done statutorily.

Bill Howell acknowledged public's comments but pointed out that without Ed Smith's bill, we would not be here talking about this program.

Joe Perry also acknowledged public's concerns. As this program is statutorily driven, it seems beyond the scope of the Council and recommends the public also visit with Representative French and Senator Shockley.

13. Council provided recommendations to FWP regarding the Regional Manager Survey. FWP will develop the survey and submit to managers.
14. Council continued to develop recommendations on the strategic plan. Topics included program marketing and outreach, Access Guide, conservation easements, monitoring, and evaluating hunter/landowner satisfaction. FWP will provide the council with an updated strategic plan outline that incorporates Council recommendations for future review. Other highlights:
  - ARM changes are likely. Recommend to keep a list of proposed ARM and statute changes.
  - ARM 12.9.702(1)(b) states that shelterbelt must be more than 400 feet from occupied buildings or outbuildings used by livestock. Council recommends to delete this requirement.
15. **Wrap-up, Review Assignments, and Adjourn.** The next Council meeting will be held in Conrad on March 24 and 25. The Council also planned another meeting to be held in Billings on May 11 and 12.
16. **Sen. Shockley adjourned the meeting at 3:00 pm.**