# MINUTES Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks UGBEPAC Meeting Hampton Inn Helena, MT

## **December 05, 2011 (Meeting 12)**

**Advisory Council members present:** Joe Perry (Chair), Mike Begley, Jay Gore, Gordon Haugen, Bill Howell, Mike Jensen, Representative Bill McChesney, Craig Roberts, Senator Jim Shockley, and Dale Tribby.

**Other staff:** Ashley Beyer, Diane Boyd, Drew Henry, Debbie Hohler, Pete Husby (NRCS), Quentin Kujala, Clive Rooney (DNRC), and Ryan Williamson.

## Monday, December 05.

- **1. Opening.** Joe Perry called the meeting to order at 8:00 AM.
  - Bill Howell moved to approve the minutes from June 20, 2011, Gordon Haugen seconded. All approved *motion carried*.
  - On behalf of the Council, Joe Perry welcomed Ryan Williamson, the new UGBEP Biologist, to the meeting. Ryan officially began his duties in Region 6 in September. Ryan is from South Dakota and completed his masters on the impacts of oil and gas developments on sharp-tailed grouse.
  - Debbie announced that Steve Atwood has replaced Ashley's vacated position in Region 7.

# 2. Review of UGBEP Annual Report

A PowerPoint presentation was given to review highlights of the annual report. The Council spent considerable time with their review, and Council's recommendations are highlighted below. Changes will be reflected in the next version of the FY 2011 annual report.

- Pittman-Robertson dollars that helped fund the biologists' positions will be reported.
- Once the ARM process has completed, "maintenance costs" will be reported in the FY 2012 annual report.
- Need to quantify hunter-days for all active projects.
- Council would like the department to revisit how work done with the MOU's in Denton and Billings are reported on the "Projects Initiated" table. Although these

MOU were initiated in 2008, work progresses annually in these areas. Further clarification of the term "initiated" is needed. Some people feel that the planning efforts may be considered as the initiation of projects, however past legislative reports consider only new and contracted projects as those initiated in a specific year.

- Need to report "expiring contracts" and also consider pending or denied projects.
- Much discussion occurred on the reporting of the "snapshot" of current activities for FY 2012. Reporting only a portion of the accomplishments may be misrepresenting the work biologists are doing on the ground. This section will not be included in version 2.
- With respect to total obligated funds: need to go back 5 years to capture those funds that are still obligated. Additionally, reports on the obligated funds should identify those funds spent on conservation easements. For the next meeting, FWP staff were asked to obtain a list of pending conservation easements that may be funded by UGBEP.
- UGBEP database: For the next Council meeting, council requests an update on the database, in terms of the review and reconciliation as well as the expected completion date. Kristina Skogen, who was recently hired as an FWP statistical assistant, will be assuming those duties for the database.
- Annual report needs to look into why there are large differences in access acreage reported between years. Data from past bienniums should be reported as well to gain a better idea of what acreages were previously enrolled.
- Council will receive annual reports first before they are made public.
- Need to elaborate on "pageviews" versus "unique views."
- Council recommends to add more pictures to the annual report to help reflect the biologists' work with projects on the ground.
- Include more narrative in the annual report to explain why there are differences between access acres with projects in FY 2011 and 2012.

# 3. Discussion of Pheasant Release program implementation

Council advised the department to send out a postcard to those people who have a history of enrolling in the program. The postcard, which will be mailed from Helena around April 15, serves to remind people to get their applications in by the deadline (May 15) if they want to be considered for the 2012 program. No further follow-up, other than the standard news releases, will be necessary to remind people to submit applications and signed contracts. Council wants to review the postcard before it is sent out to past applicants.

## 4. Opportunities to work on MDT wetland mitigations along US Hwy 2

Representative McChesney pointed out that there may be opportunities to work with MDT to build or enhance UGB habitat along with wetland mitigations. He suggested that the biologists contact the environmental unit.

#### 5. FWP and DNRC MOU

Clive presented some clarifications with the MOU between FWP and state lands. For example, soil conservation measures may not always preclude reimbursement costs. However, as stated in his earlier email, "if a project can be considered a common agricultural conservation practice it would not require compensation. An example of this would be shelter belts which can be considered a normal conservation practice to minimize soil erosion." Identifying any reimbursement for the loss of agricultural income will likely be decided on a case by case basis.

Clive pointed out that maintenance is always a concern, but the biologists should engage land-use planners to drum up projects. Also, the DNRC staff will know who would want to partner on UGBHEP projects. Clive knows of 2 projects right away. Craig pointed out that the local unit manager in Daniel's County should be contacted.

#### 6. Conservation Easements

Craig Roberts summarized some general thoughts on easements – the costs are a concern for folks, but Craig reminded that FWP easements are in perpetuity. Cost per acre over time should be a way to look at easements costs compared to a 15-year shelterbelt whereby costs may be higher per acre over a 15-year timeframe. In terms of maintenance costs, FWP has no annual maintenance costs on the Coffee Creek. Instead, FWP staff visits annually to ensure easement in compliance with the terms of the easements. Regarding Coffee Creek – the landowners (PF) have an obligation to maintain food plots, shelterbelts, etc. With regard to all of FWP easements, "maintenance" is the responsibility of the landowner. Debbie followed up with 2 slides from Region 6 that showed efforts underway to conserve the Milk River corridor west of Glasgow. Conservation easements compliment nearby WMAs, public land sections (DNRC), and Block Management areas to create a block of conservation along the Milk River that is open to public access.

### 7. Review of Proposed ARM changes

Council reviewed the proposed changes to upland game bird release ARM and the habitat ARM. Council feedback will be incorporated into a new version of ARM.

February 1, 2012, marks the initial date when proposed changes to the ARM will be filed. Rules will go into effect on May 11. Highlights follow:

## **Upland Game Bird Release Program (12.9.6)**

• <u>Proposed</u>: A minimum of 100 pheasants per application, with a release site of 320 acres per application.

<u>Council recommendations</u>: At this time, the Council has advised the department to not proceed with this new ARM. Council will discuss this particular ARM at an undetermined date in the future.

<u>Proposed</u>: Removal of "resetting the clock if severe winter weather." One 5-year renewal to establish pheasants if significant habitat enhancements occur.
 <u>Council recommendations</u>: OK to proceed.

- <u>Proposed</u>: Application deadline to be changed from May 15 to January 15.
   <u>Council recommendations</u>: OK to proceed.
- <u>Proposed:</u> Cost per 10-week pheasant will be determined by FWP.
   <u>Council recommendations</u>: OK to proceed.
- <u>Proposed</u>: Supplemental feeding only in Sheridan, Daniels, and Roosevelt counties.
   <u>Council recommendations</u>: OK to proceed.

# Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program (12.9.7)

- <u>Proposed</u>: Habitat projects may be considered on private lands that are less than 100 acres if the project is situated adjacent to public land that guarantees public access.
   <u>Council recommendations</u>: Council offered additional refinements. Projects may be considered on any lands less than 100 acres where access is adjacent, although the access acreage does not need to be directly adjacent to the project acreage.
- <u>Proposed</u>: FWP may use other department funds to cost-share UGBEP projects on department administered lands.

Council recommendations: OK to proceed.

• <u>Proposed</u>: Removed section that emphasizes private lands – public and private lands will have "equal footing" where applicable.

<u>Council recommendations</u>: OK to proceed.

• <u>Proposed</u>: Most of the original content is removed in the Reporting Requirements section. Statute captures reporting requirements.

<u>Council recommendations</u>: Council offered refinements; OK to proceed.

- <u>Proposed</u>: Removal of the department's 75% cost-share to allow percentages to be negotiated by field biologists, based on the value of the project and other factors.
   <u>Council recommendations</u>: Council offered refinements and will agree to support this change only if the department identifies criteria that will allow negotiating cost-shares. Department will include criteria in the ARM.
- <u>Proposed</u>: The annual NRCS cost model and other relevant cost models may be used to estimate projects such as fences, shelterbelts, etc.

Council recommendations: OK to proceed.

- <u>Proposed</u>: A new ARM Rule identifies and defines maintenance costs. <u>Council recommendations</u>: OK to proceed.
- <u>Proposed</u>: A new ARM Rule that contains terms and definitions listed in the UGBEP Strategic Plan.

<u>Council recommendations</u>: Council offered refinements; OK to proceed.

## 8. Meeting conclusion

Senator Shockley requested that Diane give a presentation at next meeting on how to increase the survivability of pen-raised birds that are released. Next Council meeting will be on April 16 and 17 in Miles City. Travel day will be on Sunday, April 15.

**Adjourned.** Joe Perry adjourned the meeting at 3:40 PM