
MINUTES AND MEETING SUMMARY (FINAL)
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks UGBEP CAC Meeting
FWP R7 Headquarters
Miles City, MT

April 16 and 17, 2012 (Meeting 13)

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

Other staff and guests: Steve Atwood, Diane Boyd, John Ensign, Melissa Foster, Julie French, Stan French, Debbie Hohler, Quentin Kujala, Rick Northrup, Kristina Skogen, and Ryan Williamson.

Monday, April 16.

1. **The Council and FWP staff convened at 5:00 a.m. to travel to sharp-tailed grouse and sage-grouse lek sites.** People were onsite at 5:45 a.m. and witnessed sage-grouse males displaying on leks. Travel to a nearby lek allowed folks to view sharp-tail grouse displaying on a lek. At 8:00 a.m., the group met with Jim Reilly, an UGBEP cooperator who manages his rangeland through a rest-rotation grazing system. Jim described his initial speculation about the cross fences and concluded with the benefits of this system. Jim is very happy with the system.
2. **Opening.** Joe Perry called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m..
 - Bill Howell moved to approve the minutes from December 5, 2011, Gordon Haugen seconded. All approved - *motion carried*.
 - Before the Council commenced with the agenda, Joe Perry stated that he would like to see shelterbelt contracts extended that would cost-share renovations and maintenance activities. Perhaps that can be a new practice? Jay suggested that shelterbelt contracts are revisited 2 years before the expiration date.

3. **Second review of the FY 2011 UGBEP Annual Report.** Council continued to have good inputs to the annual report. Still need clarification on administrative costs and use of P-R dollars. Debbie will confirm budget with Caryn Dearing. As stated in statute, Council evaluate whether objectives, goals, and performance measurements established in the strategic plan. The annual report contained FY 2011 performance measures listed on pages 106 through 108; however it was difficult to assess program performance at this time. Council wants to see reports on region-specific performance measures (via work plan summaries). Council discussed UGBEP budget in FY 2011. Concern was mentioned that the budget started with approximately 3.5 million in funds. Project expenditures (FY 2011) were leveraged with other partners' dollars – resulting in approximately 36% of total UGBEP cost contributions. In the previous biennium, UGBEP contributed to over half the total project costs. This change likely contributed to a small dent in the beginning balance. Further comments on table reporting – particularly need to better format new project implementations, expired contracts, and budgets.
4. **Program update:** Debbie provided a status of Open Fields for Game Bird Hunters, noting a high volume of interest (approximately 200 applications).

Public comments to ARM were reviewed – there was general support by the public for the proposed changes and adoptions. One public comment from Sheridan County expressed concern over deleting “will” and adding “may” to 12.9.706, which guides the department with program violations. It was pointed out that “may” will allow FWP to work with cooperators if situations occur outside the cooperator's control. The UGBEP contract also ensures accountability. Julie French went on record that she has responded to Ed Smith's comments.

An upland game bird hunter-day and estimated expenditure worksheet, created by a member of the public, was submitted to one known gun dog group but may have been distributed to more groups. The worksheet contained many inconsistencies and errors. Council was made aware of this worksheet as the individual mentioned he was putting together economic information to EQC. This worksheet was also reviewed by the Council.

- 5. Biologists' presentations:** Diane, Ryan, and Steve gave presentations summarizing on the ground efforts. Melissa Foster, FWP Biologist in Glendive, also gave a presentation on her work on sage-grouse. Council follow up discussions included comments on solid stem winter wheat – observed benefits for UGB. Additionally, Arnold Hawthorn serves as an alternative host and is prone to disease (deer find it highly palatable) – not recommended for shelterbelt plantings. “Sea berry” is relatively new and may offer exceptional habitat benefits to UGB. Craig has had good results planting safflower – recommends species in food plots. Dale mentioned the Montana Conservation Camp (a cooperative-type position used for labor).

There have been recent challenges to habitat efforts done on public land. These challenges result from statutes that address procurement and labor laws. Laws have proven very restrictive on how the program is implemented on public lands. Since early 2012, Helena staff have been working with FWP Procurement and FWP Design and Construction to identify these challenges and seek solutions within the framework of the law. Historically, UGBEP has not been impeded by these relatively new laws. Craig noted that this circumstance is the “tip of the iceberg” and even the Habitat Forever positions potentially are undergoing “liability paralysis.” FWP Helena staff will continue to work to resolve these issues but may hit a roadblock. Council has expressed deep concern and a commitment to resolve these issues. Council – though advisory – are extremely effective to help meet program needs.

- 6. Public Comment.** Scott Hicswa, president of the Tongue River Chapter of Pheasants Forever, provided updates to the Council on efforts to enhance UGB habitat around the Miles City area. This chapter also works closely with BLM. Dean Seifert, Miles City, also gave comment to the Council regarding PF/UGBEP/BLM projects in the area. Dean expressed dissatisfaction on projects, government agencies, and processes.
- 7.** Diane Boyd summarized peer-reviewed, published research on survivability of pen-reared pheasants. It is clear, given the available research, that habitat remains the key to establish pheasant populations. Reported losses of pen-reared pheasants may be as high as 80% within the first week of release. The UGBEP will continue to release 10-week old pheasants to establish populations in areas with appropriate habitat, as required by statute.

8. Kristina Skogen, “newly” hired Administrative Assistant, reported to Council on efforts with the UGBEP database. Kristina handed out progress notes detailing accomplishments. With the exception of approximately 8 contracts, all active habitat contracts have been reviewed.

9. **Meeting conclusion.** Joe asked Council members to stay together for 1 more year as there is still work to do. If a member wants to leave, please let Joe know as soon as possible.

Next UGBEP Meeting: Helena

September 10 (Monday) and 11 --- (travel day is Sunday)

Staff Tasks:

- Contact Colorado to find out the status of the Russian olive survey
- Provide an explanation and example of an Abstract of Notice to biologists; perhaps a memo from legal

On agenda for next meeting:

- Continued discussion on “roadblocks” to habitat enhancement efforts – including update
- Need more discussion on Block Management Areas + UGBEP projects
- Review biennial report
- Council to discuss hiring wildlife tech for UGB biologists

Adjourned. Joe Perry adjourned the meeting on Tuesday at 12:04 p.m.