

Region 6 Citizens Advisory Council Minutes
March 26, 2009
Senior Citizens Center, Culbertson

CAC members present: John Crohn, Steve Sukut, Fran Buell, Howard Pippin (for Les Schaaf), Connie Iversen, Robert Smith, Tom Burch, Bill Buckley, Dustin Hill, Bernie Hart, Darlyne Dascher

CAC members absent: Scott Billingsley (submitted comments), Les Schaaf (Howard Pippin substituted), Dennis Idler, Rich Stuker, Carl Totman

FWP staff present: Pat Gunderson, Woody Baxter, Harold Wentland, Mike Herman, Ron Selden, Ann Engstrom, Scott Thompson, Rodney Iverson.

Guests: Stan Lund, Walt Arends, Ed Smith, Bill Geer, Kenneth Engelke

Pat Gunderson welcomed the group and called for public comments. Ed Smith, former legislator, reviewed the history and evolution of the Sandhills Block Management Area and the Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program. He also spoke of the economic importance of upland bird hunting in Region 6, especially in the northeastern corner.

Bill Geer of the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership presented a program on the Montana Sportsmen User-Value Mapping Project.

Pat led a discussion on a summary list of the top issues and challenges in Region 6 and reviewed the 2008-09 game damage program. Also discussed was the Hunt for Humanity antlerless deer donation program and recent donations to the Montana Food Bank Network. Pat gave an update on numerous legislative bills.

Harold Wentland gave an update on statewide wolf management. Ed Smith said that when the federal government proposed the re-introduction of wolves, they were supposed to cover the costs. But FWP ended up contributing funds that were supposed to be used for coyote control.

FWP Program Updates

FISHERIES: Staff was unable to attend but prepared handouts for the meeting.

COMMUNICATION AND EDUCATION: Ron Selden discussed the status of the Region's Hunter and Bowhunter Education programs, advancements in online offerings, updates on the Hooked on Fishing and Kids to Fish programs, recent youth ice fishing events, upcoming activities, and media and communications issues.

Tom Burch and Connie Iversen suggested that CAC members be solicited to help at the various events and activities. Robert Smith suggested using email to organize the members.

ENFORCEMENT: Warden Captain Mike Herman went over regional staffing. Shawn Briggs is moving to Lewistown and trainee Todd Tryan of Havre will take Shawn's place. FWP is current short seven officers; only four of those slots are slated to be filled because of financial considerations.

Mike added that there has been a lot of game damage work this past winter, which took a great deal of time. Regarding fisheries issues, Mike said the division plans to help with small pond surveys and development for potential stocking, as well help the Parks Division locate new sites.

Mike said there are a number of ongoing investigations across the Region, including numerous residency and landowner-sponsored license cases, the poaching of four moose on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, and a new outfitter case in the Culbertson area, among others.

Mike noted that Governor Schweitzer and Attorney General Bullock recently recognized all of the emergency responders – including Shawn, Ron Howell and himself -- who assisted during a January shooting incident in Glasgow.

Bernie Hart asked whether there's been any progress on the bull elk that was illegally killed last fall in the Saco area. Mike said early tips about the case haven't panned out.

WILDLIFE: Harold announced that he is retiring on Dec. 1, and that Havre-area biologist Al Rosgaard is leaving in late April.

Harold said mule and white-tailed deer numbers were running about 50 percent and 30 percent, respectively, over long-term averages at the beginning of last fall's hunting seasons. Spring surveys are still being completed, so the full extent of harvest and winterkill is not yet known. He figures a total of about 1,200 deer were taken through the special management seasons and from landowner kill permits.

Harold said that it appears that mourning doves, sharp-tailed grouse, and Hungarian partridge seemed to have fared well through the harsh winter. Pheasants probably didn't do as well, but spring crowing counts will help determine remaining numbers. Antelope surveys won't take place until July, so it will be awhile before their status is known.

Harold said hunters reported that quite a few ducks died below Fort Peck Dam this winter. Two moose were taken through state permits last season in the Sweetgrass Hills.

There are three main research projects going on in Region 6: Antelope migration along the U.S. and Canadian border; sage grouse in north Valley County and southern Saskatchewan; and mountain lions on the Rocky Boy's and Fort Belknap reservations.

Harold also reviewed the recent purchase of 400 acres of land near Nelson Reservoir that will be used for additional public access and wildlife management. Other access projects include the Larb Hills and Three Buttes cooperative units.

The Region 6 Block Management program in 2008 had 287 cooperators totaling 1.4 million acres. About 60,000 hunter days were spent on these private properties last year.

PARKS: Woody Baxter discussed pending projects, including the status of efforts to purchase a tract of land at the confluence of the Milk and Missouri rivers, and a potential new Fishing Access Site (FAS) on the Milk River west of Glasgow.

Updates on the Nelson Reservoir site, which is currently owned and run by the federal Bureau of Reclamation, and the new Alkali Creek FAS were given, as well as details on a proposal to create a children's fishing pond in the Scobey area.

TRAPPING RESOLUTION: CAC member Fran Buell led a discussion on a proposed resolution stating that the advisory group supports continued trapping in Montana. The motion to adopt the resolution was forwarded by Steve Sukut and seconded by Darlyne Dascher. The vote was unanimously in favor. Pat will forward the resolution to FWP administrators in Helena.

Also discussed was the identification of high-conflict trapping areas. It was determined that while there may have been some isolated instances of domestic animals getting caught in traps in Region 6, there are not likely any areas here that fit into this high-conflict category.

CAC Roundtable

Scott Billingsley, Glasgow – (written comments) The Glasgow chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation wants to thank FWP for the cooperative effort in getting and releasing turkeys in the Milk River Valley in two separate locations between Glasgow and Tampico.

It's great to see the results when groups cooperate and work together. The group would like to see more restrictive regulations placed on the fall turkey hunt, particularly the harvest of hens. We have a very small population to begin with which has not grown much in past years. The harvest of any hens can be detrimental to the population. We would also like to see the weapons used methods streamlined to the same weapons used during the spring season.

In the past years during the CAC roundtables, there have been many questions brought forth in discussions that have not been answered at the time and the term " we'll get back to you on that" has been frequently used. Most of the time there hasn't been any follow-

up. I would like to see all questions answered whether it be via email to all members or at the next meeting.

Scott said he still has several of these questions out on the table. The one he's asked most frequently is the status of "stock ponds" in the Valley County and other areas. More emphasis needs to be placed on these once-highly used but now status-unknown ponds. Get these ponds restocked with fish that the common sportsman can catch use without the need for boats and highly technical electronics.

Pat noted that Region 6 staff is working to provide quicker and more complete responses to CAC inquiries. He added that updated fisheries information, including some pond reports, were distributed at today's meeting.

Scott also raised the issue of illegal use of ATV's. He suggested that we start with the landowners in Block Management that are complaining about the misuse and abuse of ATV's and other vehicles been driven all over the place. Start making these areas very strict walk-in areas only. You shoot something in there and you need to get out the pack frames, sleds or game carts to retrieve the animal. He said the FWP Commission should institute mandatory fines and punishments for violators.

Scott thanked fellow CAC members for their calls, cards and thoughts after the January shooting in Glasgow, where he and his wife were injured.

John Crohn, Dagmar – John said his neighbors feed upland game birds in the winter. The birds eat about 60 gallons of feed every five days. Pheasants have been hard hit in his area due to the long, hard winter. Most surviving pheasants in his area are roosters.

Howard Pippin, Saco -- His area has been pretty quiet as far as fish and wildlife issue go. However, there is a lot of local interest in the legislative debate over stream access.

Steve Sukut, Glasgow – He's heard from folks who are concerned about fall turkey regulations, particularly the taking of hens and use of rifles. He's also heard some complaints about elk being inaccessible in the southern areas of Phillips and Valley counties. One person has suggested that hunters should be allowed to hold a second buck tag for use along the Milk River. Harold said the idea has been broached in the past.

A discussion about potential strategies for reducing doe populations ensued. One idea is to start an earn-a-buck program, where hunters would be required to harvest a certain number of does before they could kill a buck.

Bernie Hart added that he's not sure that such a program would be feasible on a large scale. He noted that some ranchers are already requiring hunters to do this.

Darlyne Dascher, Glasgow – From the reports she's heard, ice fishing is slow on Fort Peck Reservoir. Deer numbers are still high in her area. For the past couple of years,

she's asked hunters to take a few does while they're on her property. But that hasn't been very successful.

Discussion on whether at least some CAC meetings should be scheduled on Saturdays in recognition of members who can't always get away from their jobs on weekdays. John Crohn suggested that perhaps half of the meetings in the future could be set for weekends.

Fran Buell, Gildford – Fran agrees with Steve Sukut regarding elk accessibility. She's also noticed numerous bands of antelope and deer hanging around her home place this winter.

Fran said fur prices are very depressed this year, and that typically means a decrease in new trappers getting into the business. She's already received 90 applications for this year's youth trapping camp, which is set for the second weekend of June.

Connie Iversen, Culbertson – She's heard concerns from neighboring ranchers about FWP's bison-quarantine program, which the Fort Peck Tribes have expressed interest in. Producers are worried that they'll have difficulties selling their cattle if bison are pastured nearby. She added that there have been 50 to 60 deer on her place all winter.

Robert Smith, Poplar – The past few years haven't been very productive for geese, but this year looks promising because of all the moisture. He's been asked why FWP doesn't allow a spring goose season on some species. Pat Gunderson said a spring season isn't currently in the federal framework for waterfowl management.

Tom Burch, Fort Peck – As a follow-up to the discussion of federal wilderness issues at the September CAC meeting, Tom and two friends have drafted a letter to be sent to Gov. Schweitzer and the congressional delegation. If others are interested in sending similar correspondence, please see him.

Bill Buckley, Fairview – Pat welcomed Bill to his first CAC meeting since he was appointed to the seat. Nominations for new terms will open this spring in order to seat new and reappointed members at the fall meeting. Ron was asked to send the list of terms to each member. Bill noted that there are high numbers of road-killed deer between Glendive and Fairview, which has becoming increasingly common in recent years.

Dustin Hill, Scobey – At least seven deer have recently died in town. There are a lot of other animals hanging around waiting for the weather to break and the heavy snow to melt. Pat said in the winter of 2003-04 and this past winter, Region 6 staff met with town leaders to discuss the deer issue.

Bernie Hart, Hinsdale – Deer and pheasants appear to be in good shape in his area of the Milk River corridor. He and others in the area are concerned about the number of bucks taken during the past management seasons. He asked whether the hunts could take place earlier in the year, before the bucks drop their antlers. Pat explained the reasons

behind the timing of management seasons and how they and kill-permit programs are structured.

Mike Herman added that weather is a big factor. If conditions don't worsen, there's no sense sending a lot of hunters out before deer are feeding more heavily. In addition, it doesn't make sense to open a special deer hunt if there is any elk hunting still going on. Invariably, hunters will choose elk over deer in those circumstances.

Further discussion took place on ways to entice more hunters to take does during the general season, which in at least some cases would negate the need for management hunts later. Pat noted that FWP reduced the cost for some second antlerless deer licenses sold to nonresident hunters last season. Ed Smith said that in his experience, price is definitely an issue.

Pat led a discussion on potential CAC topics and projects for the year, including whether the group wants to become more involved in the next round of big-game season setting. Steve Sukut added that perhaps turkey regulations could be reviewed, as well. Scott Thompson presented a brief report on Region 6 turkey harvest over the past few years.

Fran Buell said she'd like to go out on a swift fox survey. Pat said the department may use private trappers for upcoming translocations. He added that CAC members are always welcome to come out in the field with our biologists and wardens.

Bernie Hart said it would be beneficial to have regular status reports on various game species. For example, he and his friends have quit hunting sage grouse in recent years because of population concerns. It would be good to know if and when numbers rebound.

Darlyne Dascher requested a statewide update on prairie dogs. Tom Burch said it would be good to get better connected with FWP's other CACs. Ron Selden said he'd start distributing meeting notices from other regions to our members.

The next meeting is set for the afternoon and evening of June 2 at the Fort Peck Hatchery.

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