

**Region 6 Citizens Advisory Council Minutes**  
**January 12, 2010**  
**Duck Inn, Havre**

CAC members present: Rich Stuker, Darlyne Dascher, Don Groven, Bernie Hart, Steve Harada, Fran Buell

CAC members absent: Steve Sukut (submitted written comments), Dustin Hill, Robert Smith, Jason Deming, Les Schaaf, Stan Lund, Connie Iversen, Tom Burch, Scott Billingsley

FWP staff present: Pat Gunderson, Mike Herman, Mark Sullivan, Steve Dalbey, Wes Oedekoven, Jim Kropp, Shane Reno, Scott Story, Sue Daly, Chris Smith, Tim Roth, Dirk Paulsen, Cody Nagel, Ron Selden

Guests: Willie Doll, Fish, Wildlife & Parks Commissioner, District 4, Malta; Craig Miller, Havre BLM; Mike Combs, Cal Simon, Carolyn Anderson.

Pat Gunderson welcomed the group. During the public comment period, Carolyn Anderson and Cal Simon, both representing Walleye's Unlimited Fresno Chapter, presented a recent letter from the group to the federal Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and the state's congressional delegation.

The letter asks BOR to reclassify Fresno Reservoir as a multi-use recreational area. Carolyn said the Milk River impoundment is currently only classified as an irrigation operation. She said the WU group also wants minimum-pool rules upheld at Fresno. The high levels of recreational use at the reservoir should warrant both changes, she explained.

Carolyn and fellow Fresno Chapter member Mike Combs of Havre also requested an increased presence of FWP wardens at the reservoir in general, but especially just before and during the group's Walleye Challenge Tournament in May.

Mike also inquired about the possibility of FWP adding more forage fish to Fresno Reservoir. In the past, he said, perch from Lake Mary Ronan in western Montana were moved there to increase the reservoir's forage base. He said Beaver Creek Reservoir south of Havre could provide an ample stock of perch if FWP chooses to move more fish.

Scott Story of FWP's Data Services Division presented information on the ongoing Crucial Areas Assessment Project and mapping service, which is part of the agency's Fish and Wildlife Comprehensive Strategy. Pat Gunderson reviewed a variety of past Region 6 projects funded through the State Wildlife Grants program.

Jim Kropp, chief of FWP's Enforcement Bureau, gave an overview of programs. He noted that there are only 70 field wardens spread out across the 56 counties of the state, and that most of these employees are relatively new to the agency.

Jim said a lot of effort has been put into raising the profile of the TIP-MONT program. That's now paying off because the hotline now receives about 2,000 calls a year, a number that has doubled over the past five years.

Mike Combs asked that TIP-MONT signs be provided for display at Fresno Reservoir. He offered to do the work of putting the signs up if FWP will provide them.

Jim examined the rationale behind covert enforcement actions, including the recent case where a trophy bighorn sheep ram in Hunting District 680 was killed by an FWP employee working undercover.

While the loss of such a fine animal is certainly regrettable, he said the ram was likely going to be taken illegally in the near future anyway. Sacrificing this animal as part of an enforcement action may prevent the loss of other animals, he said.

CAC member Steve Harada said he's heard from lots of folks who are concerned about the loss of the ram. He said many people think the incident gives FWP "a black eye."

CAC member Fran Buell said she's heard concerns about pulling such a large animal out of the bighorn herd's gene pool. Jim said the department strives to not kill animals during enforcement actions, but sometimes it's impossible to avoid – especially if a warden or other officer is put into danger if they don't pull the trigger.

Fran raised questions about the incidental taking of a trapped animal after a quota has been reached. She also discussed the pending Initiative 160, which if approved by voters would ban trapping on public lands in the state.

Chris Smith provided an overview of FWP's long-term funding and an update on the Discovery Center project in Helena. Fran inquired about ongoing funding assistance in regards to the Montana Trappers Association's education programs.

Steve Harada asked if the agency has looked into making the voluntary fee assessed for Parks Division through vehicle license plate sales mandatory. Sue Daly explained that such a change must be approved by the Legislature.

Steve suggested that permanent boat validation be scrapped in favor of annual registration, which would raise more revenue. He also suggested the state increase fees on non-residents. Scott Story said there have been proposals to tax binoculars, sleeping bags and other outdoors equipment. CAC member Rich Stuker added that Montana's recreational-vehicle registration fees are very low. They could potentially be increased to help fund FWP programs.

Darlyne Dascher said she'd also be in favor of changing the "opt-out" portion of vehicle registration. When she served on the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission, she said she pushed for the creation of more parks and fishing access sites, especially in Eastern Montana. There seems to be a trend away from that now, she added. Rich Stuker added that most of the money for such programs seems to be going to the west side of the state.

### **FWP PROGRAM UPDATES**

Region 6 program managers submitted written updates to all CAC members prior to the meeting.

### **CAC ROUNDTABLE**

**Bernie Hart, Hinsdale** – White-tailed deer and pheasants appear to be doing well in his area, despite the harsh winter conditions. He's currently serving on the Upland Game Bird Advisory Council and would appreciate hearing from folks regarding their questions, concerns or ideas about potential projects. He added that studies show that upland bird hunting contributed about \$14 million in 2008 to Region 6.

**Fran Buell, Gildford** – Fran asked that the CAC approve a resolution and draft a letter in opposition to proposed Initiative 160. A coalition group called Montanans for Effective Wildlife Management has been formed to fight I-160. She detailed the likely impacts of the new law if it is passed by voters. Fran also expressed concern about the low numbers of wildlife in her area this winter, particularly pronghorn antelope.

**Steve Sukut, Glasgow** – (written comments read) Steve said he'd been approached by several folks regarding how a Malta-area rancher was allowed "to pick and choose who gets to harvest a damage-season cow elk" on his property.

Steve said he wasn't aware that they could do that, but at the time he told the folks asking about the issues that if you really want to reduce the number of animals, having people who know how to do it and are actually going to show up would probably be most effective than leaving it up to members of the general public.

Steve said he thought that approach is much more effective than having a "shot-gun" start of 50 to 100 hunters "who would have all the elk back on posted land in less than a day." Nonetheless, Steve said one of the sportsmen asked what was going to stop landowners from simply selling these types of licenses to somebody else. Money talks, Steve said, and is a temptation to us all.

Steve also discussed the game-damage hunt on property west of Glasgow and the related issue of game damage licenses being given away to those appointed by the landowner. Even though Steve was a direct beneficiary, he said the policy makes him "very nervous" because it appears that this method of allocating tags is flirting with a Ranching for Wildlife scenario.

Steve said these animals belong to Montana, and Montana hunters want to hunt them, but it appears that FWP is allowing the landowners more latitude for management than is safe. He added that he thinks the policy sets “a very dangerous precedent,” and the department needs to develop other ways to conduct game-damage hunts.

*Pat Gunderson comments inserted: FWP has the ability to issue Supplemental Game Damage licenses to a landowner that qualifies for game damage assistance. The landowner typically designates nine individuals (75%) and FWP draws three names (25%) off of the game damage hunt roster. In the past two years this has been used on elk in the Breaks and no elk were harvested, but hunters were in place if problems occurred. In the case of the Milk River area ranch, the use of the supplemental game damage licenses was in addition to a game damage hunt on this property that was all public hunters.*

Steve also addressed issues surrounding the proposed Initiative 161, which would eliminate the guaranteed outfitters tags. While there needs to be more restrictions on the outfitting industry, the business is not going away.

“So we have to figure out some way for them to make a living, yet restricting their tendency to expand and excessively harbor big game,” he said. They need limits, he added, “or their greed will cause the resident sportsmen to band together and do their best to put them out of business.”

**Darlyne Dascher, Fort Peck** – She noted that FWP released more deer antlerless licenses in Hunting District 652 this past season, and that led to a lot more hunters in the area. Quite a number of deer were apparently harvested. She added that a small group of antelope in her area continues to slowly expand.

Darlyne asked why McCone County is not included in the responsibility areas for the two new upland game bird biologists in Regions 6 & 7. She also asked the group to write a letter in support of the Parks Division programs in Region 6. She added that she is in favor of a CAC letter against I-160.

**Rich Stuker, Chinook** – Rich made motions for the CAC to adopt resolutions against I-160 and in support of the Region 6 Parks’ program. Both were approved unanimously. Darlyne offered to draft the Parks’ letter, and Fran will draft the I-160 letter.

Pat Gunderson raised the issue of whether or not there needs to be a quorum of members present to pass resolutions. He said the CAC’s charter needs to be consulted to find out for sure. Pat said he’ll see that the resolutions are passed on to agency folks in Helena.

Rich added that the past hunting season went well, but there are still lots of deer north of Chinook. He feels deer numbers are still too high on his property and on some of his neighbor’s places. On the other hand, bird numbers appear to still be heading down. Rich also expressed concern about ongoing trespassing on private property in his area.

**Steve Harada, Wolf Point** – Steve asked if mule-deer management objectives were being met in Hunting District 652. Darlyne said she heard of some large bucks harvested in her area. He also expressed concern at the low number of CAC members who made it to the meeting.

Steve also addressed the issue of cormorants feeding on game fish and asked if there are legal ways they can be controlled. He said he's in favor of opening Montana's big game seasons on Saturdays instead of Sundays and would like to see the CAC support that proposal in the new regulations because it should help our rural communities economically.

Steve also discussed the issue of a general elk management season across much of Region 6 and whether additional areas should be turned into permit areas. He said he'd like to see larger numbers of elk around. He added that he didn't think that many landowners would be opposed to that.

Rich Stuker responded that he's personally "very against" the idea, and he knows a lot of other landowners who take the same position. Rich said the number of elk originally proposed for the Bear's Paw Mountains is now "four or five times" what was envisioned. And that causes a lot of problems for area ranchers, especially with fencing and feed.

Darlyne added that she's observed what's happened with elk populations in the Breaks over the years. The numbers, she said, need to be tightly controlled.

**Don Groven, Havre** – As a new member of the CAC, Don said he's learned a lot already. He's now especially aware of how many issues FWP deals with, as well as their complexity. But sometimes, he said, "it seems that we monitor more than we manage."

Don said he supports the expansion of FWP education efforts across the state. He added that it appears the agency is listening more than it has at times in the past.

Fran Buell added that there should be more CAC members at the meeting. She also criticized FWP staff members who did not stay for the entire meeting. In her opinion, they should have been present for the member roundtable.

Pat Gunderson led a discussion about future meeting venues, times and agenda structure. Willie Doll made additional comments about cormorant control, several pending regulation changes, lead-shot issues and landowner relations. Mark Sullivan gave a brief overview of other tentative regulations now being considered by the Commission.

The next CAC meeting will likely take place in Glasgow sometime in March. Members will be queried to determine potential dates and to develop agenda items.

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