

Region 6 Citizens Advisory Council Minutes
June 14, 2011
Cottonwood Inn, Glasgow

CAC members present: Steve Harada, Don Groven, Jim Carver, Connie Iversen, Scott Billingsley, Darlyne Dascher, Fran Buell, Henry Gordon, Bernie Hart, Tom Burch, Dustin Hill

CAC members absent: Les Schaaf, Mark Peterson, Jason Deming, Stan Lund

FWP staff present: Steve Dalbey, Mike Herman, Mark Sullivan, Ron Selden, Woody Baxter, Kristina Pechacek

Guests: Brenner Flaten, Montana Catfish Association; Joan Erickson, Larslan-area farmer

Steve Dalbey welcomed the group and reviewed the agenda. During the public comment section, Brenner Flaten said he supports changing the catfish limit from 20 to 10 in the Eastern Fishing District, in part because there's a lot more pressure on the resource now than there used to be.

Joan Erickson later told the group about extensive game damage on their hay operation last winter. FWP has provided the farm with fencing and other materials to deter the deer, but they have not had time to put all of it up. Several CAC members offered their ideas for dealing with the problem.

Dalbey reviewed other proposed regulation changes and the rationale behind them. Jim Carver noted that FWP has a public comment area on the agency web site, but there are very few details included. Dalbey explained that those entries only reflect the first stages of the scoping process.

Steve Harada had questions about Missouri River sauger surveys. Harada feels it's premature to double sauger limits in Fort Peck Reservoir because numbers don't seem very high. Bernie Hart noted that folks used to catch saugers in the Milk River outside Hinsdale, but not now.

Tom Burch said authorization for the warm water fishing stamp, which helps fund Fort Peck Hatchery operations, is set to end soon. He noted that the walleye egg take this year was about half of normal. Fran Buell said the hatchery was sold as a multi-species facility, but it has fallen far short of its goals. Dalbey said he wasn't prepared to address specific hatchery issues but would invite acting manager Wade Geraets to the next CAC meeting.

Dalbey also reviewed the pending Fort Peck Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan, which triggered a long debate about catch rates. Water level management and the number of allowable tournaments also were addressed.

Mark Sullivan reviewed reductions in big game license quotas. Mule deer and antelope licenses are being sharply reduced throughout the Region because of the impacts of last winter. The number of white-tailed deer licenses is also being scaled back, but whitetail numbers are still fairly strong (note: this meeting was prior to EHD die-off). Sullivan said the FWP Commission has created a new elk archery group that will be holding four meetings to further examine recent regulation changes.

Hart asked about elk hunter success rates in the Breaks. Sullivan says it runs between 25 and 50 percent, depending on the district. Jim Carver said the elk applications are very confusing, and it's difficult to tell exactly which can be used for bow hunting and which for rifle.

Woody Baxter gave an update on the Fishing Access Site program now that the Parks Division is going to be pulling out of Region 6 at the end of the current fiscal year. Region 6 currently has 15 FAS sites, and we're working to add Bailey Reservoir west of Havre to the list. Baxter also reviewed the acquisition process. Don Groven asked why more fishing access hasn't been developed along the shoreline of Fresno and Beaver Creek reservoirs. Baxter said he's willing to consider any proposals. At least six of the Region's FAS areas sustained flood damage this spring and three of the sites remain closed.

FWP PROGRAM UPDATES

Region 6 program managers submitted written updates to members prior to the meeting. Hart asked about the status of this spring's sage grouse translocation in Alberta and the ongoing international antelope study. Henry Gordon said a lot of antelope ended up in the Bears Paw Mountains this past winter.

Brenner Flaten said now there are only two main fishing access sites on the lower Milk River. He inquired about getting a formal site established in Sullivan Park east of Glasgow. He added that it would be good to have other sites on each side of Vandalia Dam.

Hart noted that there have been several large enforcement cases the past year. Mike Herman updated the group on many of them. Hart also praised the new youth deer hunting days set aside before the general rifle season opens each October.

Buell led a discussion about furbearers versus fur-bearing animals. Herman noted that coyotes are listed as a predator species instead of a furbearer. Every animal that we have in Montana is classified in some way, he said.

CAC ROUNDTABLE

Steve Harada, Wolf Point – He was involved with the development of the last Fort Peck fisheries plan more than a decade ago. One of the most contentious issues then also were walleye catch rates. He thinks the bar should be set a little higher in the next version of the plan because fishing in the reservoir is much better now.

Don Groven, Havre – Don thanked the enforcement staff for doing pre-tournament patrols on Fresno Reservoir. The increased warden presence is very welcomed. He criticized the moving of yellow perch to outlying ponds when perch numbers are so low in Fresno. More fish should instead be transplanted there. Since Fresno is so close to the population center of Havre and doesn't winter-kill, it should warrant more attention. He also doesn't see the need to gill-net fish in Fresno. It's wasteful because the fish die and the research isn't being put to any use.

Jim Carver, Malta – The local chapter of Walleyes Unlimited is on track to help trap stranded fish out of the Nelson Reservoir irrigation canal when it gets shut down this fall. He also thinks antelope hunting district 600 is far too large and should be cut in half. He's still hearing a lot of folks in his area talking negatively about bison reintroduction, the American Prairie Foundation (APF), national monument designations and the World Wildlife Fund.

Sullivan noted that some APF lands are now being put into long-term Block Management contracts. Scott Billingsley suggested that those should be conservation easements instead. Sullivan said FWP is still talking to APF about that.

Connie Iversen, Culbertson – She said there was extensive flooding in her area, and a lot of deer habitat has been impacted along the Missouri River. She asked if there are any plans to refund deer licenses because of substantially reduced numbers. Sullivan said the issue is being discussed, but no final decisions have been made.

Scott Billingsley, Glasgow – Scott thanked FWP for getting the new fishing pond guidebooks published and distributed. Now it's time to get more fish stocked in these impoundments. He added that there's a lot of confusion about various hook and line regulation in the Dredge Cuts and in the Missouri River. Herman explained the rationale behind the rules, which are set up differently for ice and open-water fishing. He also explained the difference between harvesting fish with a spear and a bow and arrow.

Darlyne Dascher, Fort Peck – Fishing has been good in the Rock Creek area, especially during the recent tournament. She hasn't seen any deer fawns in her area, so she's glad FWP reduced the number of deer licenses this year. There were a lot of antelope around her place last winter, but she's hardly seen any this spring. There were a lot of complaints from neighboring ranchers when I-161 passed, but things have quieted down lately.

Fran Buell, Gildford – Fran went over details from the recent youth trapper camp and addressed continuing efforts to ban trapping on public lands across the state. She fully

expects the issue to be on the next ballot. Fran also reviewed the trapper education bill that was recently defeated for the third consecutive time by the Montana Legislature.

Henry Gordon, Chinook – He recently was hunting in Pennsylvania and noticed a lot of advertising in their hunting regulations. FWP should consider soliciting more ads in the state’s regulations as a source of revenue. Game damage hunts should take place earlier in the year when the weather is not so severe and hunters and get to the animals. A lot of game damage materials are given out to landowners, but much of it doesn’t get used. Maybe there should be a deadline for getting stack yards and fences put up? Regarding fish stocking at Dry Fork Reservoir north of Chinook, Gordon thinks it’s a waste of department resources.

Bernie Hart, Hinsdale – FWP has done a great job getting the upland game bird access guides put together and published, but not such a good job distributing them to the public. Maybe we should publicize them more. Bernie also read a letter from the Garfield County Conservation District regarding an apparent recent increase in the number of predators in their area. FWP needs to do a better job of controlling predators at upland game bird enhancement sites. Why not use youth trapper camp graduates to clean up these areas?

Tom Burch, Fort Peck – Tom said he enjoyed his tenure on the CAC. He also encouraged members to submit more agenda items to FWP when these meetings are being formulated.

The next CAC meeting is scheduled for Oct. 11 at Glasgow’s Cottonwood Inn. Please submit potential agenda items to Pat Gunderson or Ron Selden beforehand.

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