

Wetland Protection Advisory Council

Meeting NOTES

February 26, 2014

FWP Headquarters – 1400 S. 19th Avenue, Bozeman

Meeting Objectives:

- Provide a program update: status of approved projects and current budget
- Provide recommendations on new and proposed projects, and discuss projects not advanced to Council
- Discuss program direction and marketing
- Other issues of interest to the Council

Participants:

Henry Gordon, Gary Moses, Jim Moreland, Jim Hansen, Rick Northrup, Catherine Wightman

Update from the Wetland Summit in October:

Catherine provided an update on the Montana Wetland Council and its work specific to wetland conservation and restoration. A working group of the Wetland Council is being re-invigorated after Tom Hinz' retirement with the intent of leveraging new and existing partnerships to continue to deliver important wetland projects in Montana.

Project Updates:

North Shore WMA addition – this fee title acquisition closed at the end of February 2014. State Migratory Bird funds were not used after all for this project because Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) preferred to fund the entire amount. However, this is part of a multi-stage project of acquiring and managing property along the North Shore of the Flathead; the Wetland Protection Advisory Council will likely see additional proposals in the future.

Schillinger Reservoir – Jim Hansen discussed the Schillinger project in northeastern Montana. This was a dam repair completed in October of 2013. As part of the agreement, Jim negotiated some public access for hunting with the landowner.

Canyon Ferry WMA – This project is to create 2 new wetlands on the east side of Canyon Ferry WMA, totaling about 20-acres. There have been some delays, both because of the need for a change of water rights and some cultural issues. Both issues seem to be resolved and we expect construction to begin in summer 2014.

Budget:

Catherine provided a budget summary (see attached). The group discussed the process of funding allocation from the legislature and how to maintain a program balance while still documenting the need for additional funds.

Proposed Conservation Easements:

Flatt Conservation Easement – Council reviewed a proposal for a conservation easement on 1,760 acres in Phillips County. The property is dominated by native grasslands (49%) and CRP (43%) interspersed with numerous ephemeral and seasonal wetland basins (8%). The property is adjacent to Korsbeck Waterfowl

Production Area. The property is currently owned by Ducks Unlimited. The Council supported spending funds to acquire an easement on this property that effectively blocks up a larger landscape.

Box Elder Conservation Easement – Council reviewed a proposal for a conservation easement on 8,120 acres of primarily native mixed-grass prairie, shrub-grassland, and wetland-riparian vegetation. Henry Gordon is familiar with the property and explained the current use of the property and potential threats. This project would likely be funded through a variety of funding sources, including North American Wetland Conservation Act, Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program, Migratory Bird Habitat and other potential sources. Council was supportive of the proposal but would like to better understand the financial request to the Migratory Bird Habitat Program once a better estimate of the easement cost is available.

Proposed Wetland Projects:

Big Lake Enhancement Project - Jim Hansen discussed the need to repair water control structures at Big Lake WMA to better manage water. This is a part of the larger project that included fee title acquisition of key parcels and subsequent fencing that allowed FWP to manage more effectively the entire complex. A small North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant was awarded to FWP providing \$75,000 in cost share for water management repair at Big Lake. Council supported moving forward with this project.

Project Tracking:

Catherine handed out a two-page summary that included recently completed, in-progress, and pending projects. Jim Hansen and Catherine explained the different projects under the pending section and the group discussed why some of these may not make it to the Council for review. Catherine intends to update this tracking document on an annual basis.

Program Guidance Document and Outreach:

Catherine provided a draft guidance document that outlines program goals and objectives (as identified previously by Council), characteristics of good quality projects, and the process for moving a project forward. FWP biologists and partners working with landowners are the primary target for this document. Catherine also provided an example of a one-page outreach brochure summarizing the program. She is interested in feedback on the documents from the Council and will also be soliciting feedback from FWP biologists.

Council members were very interested in additional program outreach and marketing. Some ideas that were discussed:

- Feature the program on Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks' "Outdoor Report" TV program [*update: Catherine spoke to FWP staff and there is interest to do a feature. More forthcoming.*]
- Create a webpage about the program on FWP's website [*update: Catherine spoke to FWP website managers and this can be done easily. Catherine will be working on the text. Photos from Council members for the webpage would be appreciated!*]
- Feature the program in the publication "Montana Outdoors"
- Put a link to the program webpage on the front page of the Waterfowl Regulations with the statement "Find out what your license dollars do for wetland conservation – <http://www....etc>.

Next meeting:

Council members indicated they preferred annual, in-person meetings instead of more remote communications (e.g., email, conference call, etc.). The group discussed a field tour of projects next spring as part of the 2015 annual meeting. Early March, early June or July/August were discussed.