

# CAC Meeting

## Region 5 Citizen Advisory Council Meeting

April 9, 2014  
5:30 PM to 9:30 PM  
Fish, Wildlife & Parks  
2300 Lake Elmo Drive  
Billings, MT 59105

**Meeting called by:** Bob Gibson

**Type of meeting:** CAC Council Meeting

**Location:** Region 5 Headquarters

**Facilitator:** Bob Gibson

**Attendees:** Gregory Keller, Doug Haacke, Daniel Dutton, Mike Whittington, Doug Dreeszen, Dale Vermillion, Gary Hammond, Bob Gibson, Harold Guse, Ken Frazer, Paul Sihler, Dianne Stiff

**Absent:** Dan Aadland, Doug Habermann, Ray Mulé

### Topics

5:30-6:30 p.m.	Welcome, Dinner & Conversation	Bob Gibson
6:30-7:30 p.m.	Issues of Concern	CAC Members
7:30-8:30 p.m.	FWP: Choices for the Future	Paul Sihler
8:30-9:00 p.m.	Region 5 Fisheries Projects	Ken Frazer
9:00-9:15 p.m.	Administrative Housekeeping and Adjourn	Bob Gibson & Gary Hammond

Issues of Concern	CAC Members	
<p><b>Dan Dutton</b> – Belfry - we had an unusual winter. Typically where he lives there would be about a foot of snow, but this winter they had close to six feet of snow. Last fall the deer population was almost nonexistent both for mule deer and whitetail. Winter fishing was good. Three people he knows of took antelope last fall. The access to the BLM land was successful. Saw a few chukar's throughout the winter and hoping they will make it through.</p> <p><b>Doug Haacke</b> – Continue to work on the Bighorn River issues and always get tremendous support from FWP. A lot of feedback that people are happy with the amount of water being dumped into the Bighorn River, and encourage more water is dumped if needed. There is a planning meeting tomorrow and then one next week in Lovell, Wyoming. Talked to Ken Frazer about the Soda Butte Creek meeting and the importance of getting people to attend who support this project. This project is a suppression of nonnative fish in Soda Butte Creek. Anticipate some opposition coming from the folks who like to blog electronically out of Jackson Hole. The Willow Creek project has been a success and is looking for an update on that this spring. He has a few people who'd like to hear back on Fireman's Point FAS.</p> <p><b>Greg Keller</b> – The Fishtail area had plenty of winter. Enough snow that the ground didn't freeze even with the really cold weather. Thought they were going to lose a lot of deer, but he is seeing more deer out now than during last fall's hunting season. We have a herd of around 350 elk roaming around the area too. These elk hang in the foothills on private land and not on Forest Service land. They not only have seen two wolves on their place.</p> <p><b>Mike Whittington</b> – Hunter Landowner Stewardship Project – Mike completed this course and is quite impressed with it. He noticed that FWP is advertising it in the new hunting regulations, and noticed the Elk Foundation newsletter is promoting it also. Paul Sihler said that at the upcoming meeting of the Private Land/Public Wildlife Council, this is one of their topics of discussion. Their next meeting will be in Billings on April 23-24 at the Billings Hotel and Convention Center. Mike had guests Lee Gustafson and Ray Pearson share their concerns with the overcrowding and use conflicts on the Bighorn River.</p> <p><b>Doug Dreezen</b> – He has had feedback from hunters upset about the application fee going to \$10.00 on the bighorn sheep, goat and moose. They are concerned that will increase the number of applicants. This came from HB 401. This legislation was a collaborative effort by Trout Unlimited, Montana Stock Growers, Montana Wildlife Federation and MOGA who all carried it through the session. Paul Sihler said that the motivation behind this bill was to make it easier for families to apply. Another question was if a person draws a bighorn sheep license and then does not pay for the license, then what happens? Paul Sihler explained that there is an alternates list, and it will go to someone else. We will see how it all plays out this year. Doug said hats off to the gals at the front counter inputting applications for the March 15<sup>th</sup> deadline. Just wanted to give the four ladies kudos for the excellent job they do with the public. Doug has been working with a few people in Lewistown who are opposed to the Wilkes Brothers/Durfee Hills land trade proposal.</p> <p><b>Dale Vermillion</b> – Around Big Timber last September, they had a huge amount of whitetail deer die from the EHD. A couple of outfitters who were hunting on his place thought the numbers were down by 50%. Starting to see more dead deer now after the tough winter we had. Also he has several shed hunters that come out this time of year, and they are finding lots of racks that still have the velvet on them. There are a few turkeys and pheasants showing up on his place. The ice jams on the Yellowstone River and Sweet Grass Creek have been terrible.</p>	<p>Person responsible: Bob Gibson</p>	<p>Deadline: Future Mtgs</p>
<p>Topics for future meetings: Hunter Landowner Stewardship Project; Bighorn River Overcrowding/Conflicts</p>	<p>Person responsible: Bob Gibson</p>	<p>Deadline: Future Mtgs</p>
<p><b>FWP: Choices for the Future</b></p> <p>Video – Choices for the Future – What is important to us in our life? What do we do recreationally? What do we value? Why do we live in Montana? The resources we have in Montana are not here by accident. They are here because landowners and sportsmen and the citizens of Montana care about them, and they have entrusted the MT Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to manage them. It takes active management to keep these resources in our state, and that takes money.</p> <p>The Department has been on a 10 year funding cycle for about the last 40 or 50 years. Our last fee increase was in 2005. We are now at the point where the Department cannot continue what we have been doing as seen in the video, without a fee increase. There are some choices that constituents, the legislature, the governor and Montanans need to decide as far as what they want from the Department.</p>	<p><b>Paul Sihler</b></p>	

The Department is different from any other state agency as we are funded by license revenues. Hunters and anglers pay for the recreational opportunities that come from what FWP manage. About two thirds of our budget comes from resident and nonresident fees. The other third comes from federal excise taxes on both hunting and fishing equipment. We have received general fund money for the Aquatic Invasive Species Program from the last couple of legislative sessions, but other than that on the fish and wildlife side of the Department, we are not funded by general tax revenue.

Through a 1.2 million dollar budget cut by the Department prior to the last legislative session and 1.2 million dollars of revenue we received in the 2013 legislative session, HB 401, our revenue extends us out to fiscal year 2017 (July 1, 2016). That allows us to go to the 2015 legislature to address this decision point.

After the last legislative session Director Hagener appointed a License & Funding Advisory Committee to assist the Department with the fee increase proposal. This committee has met every month since last August with its last meeting to be held on April 17, 2014. They now have a proposal for how we should generate revenue along with some other changes.

Director Hagener's charge to this committee:

- 1) Evaluate the FWP funding model. The Committee is looking at a 4 year funding model recommendation. For a lot of reasons the 10 year funding model is no longer effective.
- 2) Propose changes to streamline and simplify license structure. The Committee is looking at standardizing age categories for youth.
- 3) Assess free and reduced price licenses. For these 30 different licenses, the Committee is recommending to create a single license with all 30 categories having a uniform 50% discount. In addition, they suggest changing the age eligibility of the senior license from 62 to 67 years of age.
- 4) Evaluate the earmarking of license funds. The Committee took no action as this is politically complex.
- 5) Propose prices for licenses that will result in a sufficient and stable source of revenue. The Committee is recommending the resident fishing be increased by \$6, the resident hunting be increased by \$8, the nonresident moose, sheep, goat and bison go from \$750 to \$1250 and the nonresident 2-day fishing be increased from \$15 to \$26 and the season fishing from \$60 to \$86.
- 6) Evaluate the role of license buyers and other fish and wildlife users in funding fish and wildlife management. The Committee told the Department that after we get done with this process, the Department will need to begin working with other nonhunting or nonangling users to address these issues.

At the same time as we have been working with the License & Funding Advisory Committee, there was legislation passed during the last session requiring the legislature to do a study of fish and wildlife funding with FWP. We have been working with Environmental Quality Council (EQC) on this. They chose to work with our Advisory Committee rather than to create their own committee. We have met with them three times (October, January and March) at their meetings. We have provided them updates on our Advisory Committees recommendations but have not received feedback from them. There was a request to the EQC to authorize their staff to draft legislation to implement these recommendations, and nothing has happened at this time.

The Department is now looking at letting everyone know what the consequences look like if we do not get a fee increase:

Choices for the Future –

- 1) Fee Increase (\$5.75M)
- 2) Budget Cuts (\$5.75M) 20% budget cut from our general license account funding
- 3) Redirection of Earmarked Program to General License Account (\$5.75M = 40% reduction) Block Management, Habitat Montana, Fishing Access Sites, Upland Game Bird and Search and Rescue

Action items: Encourage constituents to attend upcoming public hearings. The hearing at the Region 5 Headquarters will be on May 28, 2014.

Person responsible:  
Gary Hammond

Deadline:  
May 28, 2014

**Huntley Diversion Dam** – This dam is nine miles downstream from Billings on the Yellowstone River. In 1996-1997 this dam was destroyed by high water. FEMA came in to rebuild it, and the fish passage they created accommodates trout but not warmwater fish. We now have access to the site, and have DNRC money from the oil spill that is going into a new fish passage design that will have the correct gradient for all fish to pass. The work will begin this fall.

**Yellowstone River Burbot (ling) Sampling** – With the decline of burbot over the last 15-20 years, we have been doing spring netting. In the last couple of years since 2011, we have seen a significant increase. We run 90+ nets over 100 miles of river during a four week period. Because of the ice on the river this year, we had to begin two weeks later. They have caught about 140 ling so far this spring, which is way better than the last several years. Burbot are native fish with larger ling in the upper river and smaller in lower section around Waco Dam.

**Musselshell River** –With the 2011 floods irrigation structures were destroyed or changed. Biologist Mike Ruggles is working with landowners on this river. Because of the impacts on the Musselshell, we have created a special priority management area on this river. We are using state wildlife grant money. This money is set aside for species of special concern and other nongame species that need to be managed. Davis Dam near Musselshell, is the first major fish barrier on this river. There are two irrigators who run off of the Davis Dam, and we have an engineering design to remove this dam, putting in pumps farther down or putting in a bypass channel around the dam. The real emphasis for the wildlife grant is the sauger. There used to be a good sauger run in the Musselshell, but during the drought of the nineties, it pretty much disappeared. There is a landowner near Deadman's Basin Reservoir, who has spring fed oxbows that come onto his property. The landowner would like us to stock ling, but we would start with catfish and then ling, plus reestablish some sauger runs on the river. Egge dam between Lavina and Roundup had the river go completely around it after the 2011 flood. That landowner now lives in Florida and doesn't irrigate anymore. He has offered to sell us the water rights that went with this dam and/or sell us the land and water rights. If we acquire the water rights, we can then take this dam out which will then open up 25 miles of the river that has been blocked off for the last 100 years. In addition, it will reconnect major basins. This is a good catfish and smallmouth bass fishery. If we open up this stretch it will really improve both of these fisheries in that area plus then open up the area so ling can move up. The proposal is to purchase 85 acres to create a fishing access site on the river, and hopefully after talking to the Canyon Ferry Trust, we could purchase another 375 acres which will cover most of the irrigated ground and the water right. We could then take the dam out, provide additional water for the river, and then provide both hunting and fishing access to the river. Another proactive group is the watershed coalition on the Musselshell that is a composed of all the water users in the entire basin. They have hired their own water commissioners to make sure the water gets to the end of the Musselshell allowing for landowners in that area to have more water during the drought years.

### **Cutthroat Projects –**

Upper Boulder River System - There is a waterfall area with enough of a gradient that it has kept the brook trout out and there are cutthroat trout with the exception of historical stocking of rainbow trout in some of the lakes. After removing as many rainbows as we can out of these lakes, we'll go back in and stock super heavily with cutthroat from the hatchery. The remaining rainbow are then out competed by the bigger cutthroat and hopefully over time swamp out the remaining rainbow genetics. Last year we treated Fourmile and Meatrack creeks with rotenone to get rid of the remaining rainbow and hybrids. Next year, we hope to treat Rainbow Creek which runs down to the Boulder River. After this is complete, the whole upper Boulder system will be one interconnected cutthroat population. It is a recreational fishery, so people will be able to fish for and keep the cutthroat trout.

Soda Butte Creek – It is closed currently from Cooke City to Silver Gate and down into Yellowstone National Park. Twenty years ago we would find an occasional brook trout. We found the source of the brook trout which was a small tributary in the very upper end where mine tailings were cleaned up. Through the clean up some of the brook trout got into the river. Through a joint effort with MFWP, Forest Service, WY Game and Fish, and the Park Service for the last twenty years we've been electrofishing out the brook trout, but have are not won the battle. We've decided the only feasible solution is to treat it with rotenone, and start over. There will be a joint scoping meeting at Silver Gate with the Beartooth Alliance who has been a supportive group of this whole project.

### **Fishing Access Site Update –**

Ken is looking at about five acres of property just down river from South Billings Boulevard across the river from Riverfront Park. It is about 12 miles downstream from the Duck Creek FAS and six miles upstream from East Bridge.

The ramp at Riverside Park by Laurel is now complete.

Fireman's Point – This is the lowest access on the Stillwater. At this site the river splits and goes down a side channel with irrigation structures in it. We now have the engineering completed to put the replace the structure moving the water away from this side channel. We paid for the engineering and Stillwater County provided the money for the rock plus will do the work.

Action items: Informational

Person responsible:  
Ken Frazer

**Administrative Housekeeping & Adjourn**

**Bob Gibson**

Action items: Review new CAC applications and replace existing membership.

Person responsible:  
Bob Gibson

Deadline:  
Summer 2014