

R1 CAC 2/19/14

FWP, R1, Public Meeting Room

Present: Kari Gabriel, Bernie Cassidy, Bob Lawson, Leo Marnell, Mike Rodney, Chuck Hunt, Chancy Jeschke, Wally Wilkinson, Greg Foley, Larry Lack, Mike Corkish, Tony Anderson, Brent Mitchell, Jim Vashro, Warren Illi.

FWP: Jim Satterfield, Lee Anderson, John Fraley, Ryan Kreiner, Jim Williams, Martha Abbrescia, Commissioner Gary Wolfe.

John Fraley: "Choices for the Future", video regarding highlighting Montana's resources and the need for additional funding or possibly future program cuts...choices need to be made.

CAC asks if this video is accessible online? Fraley will find out/make suggestion.

John Fraley: Noxon Reservoir / Sub Committee Report

CAC SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE NOXON WALLEYE EA: February 5, 2014 meeting (via conference call)

The CAC subcommittee on the Noxon Reservoir Walleye EA met on Wednesday, February 5, via conference call. Attending were: Kenny Breidinger, Ryan Kreiner, Paul Fielder, and Larry Lack (in Thompson Falls via phone); and Chancy Jeschke, Mark Deleray, Ladd Knotek, John Fraley at the Kalispell FWP Headquarters. It was a very productive meeting—the results are summarized below.

*****CAC members: please review and send any comments along; the subcommittee will present and discuss the information at our next CAC meeting....**

Meeting summary:

--EA timeline: last year, released EA for public comment; July, released decision notice, continue to study walleye and produce a revised EA; October-November, scoping; new draft EA by late fall or winter....

--Kenny Breidinger:

--summarized the recent scoping comments (53 of them--please read Kenny's summary later in this document)

--discussed some of the potential alternatives that could be included in the upcoming EA

--Paul Fielder:

--organized these 53 comments into 5 major categories (please see Paul's memo below)...

--this is a volatile issue locally and working closely with the public is essential as we move forward; need an economic analysis, local economy is very important

--efforts to use the services of public anglers to gather fisheries information, etc would be positive

--Paul related that 89% of the 641 people who signed the petition opposing walleye suppression live in towns in the local area (Thompson Falls, Noxon, Trout Creek, Paradise, and Plains).

--would like to see a number of alternatives in the upcoming EA

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Chancey Jeschke:

- Chancy believes that the weight of public opinion, especially on the part of locals, should influence the project; FWP will get a black eye if they don't listen to the comments
- a thorough economic analysis should be performed as part of the EA
- Angler based sampling and control of walleye would be effective and viewed positively
- Need to look at all species in the reservoir and develop long term management goals
- What guiding documents do we have? (FWP folks listed the statewide fish management plan, Clark Fork Settlement agreement, and commission policies)
- Chancy endorsed Paul Fielder's summary and points made above

Larry Lack:

- the economic impact of whatever is proposed is very important to look at; businesses have put in a lot of time and effort into the fishery
 - We need to look at the effects of Eurasian milfoil on the fishery; could affect all species including bull trout and cutthroat
 - likes Paul's ideas of a creel census, and rewards for pike minnow similar to the lower Columbia
 - If you can use local anglers to control walleye that would be best
 - need a strong, simple public outreach effort, short articles, keep everyone informed
 - avoid emotionalism, stay positive
 - OLOC: open line of communication
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The group acknowledged that the CAC subcommittee and CAC will help us shape an effective outreach program. Kenny has already started a series of articles on the biology, and we could include acknowledgement of the range of issues and views of the public....

The group also discussed further some of the ideas that have come up, such as public anglers as partners, a creel survey, a study plan, and data needs.

All agreed that communication will help greatly in finding an effective management direction.

As an example of how important communication is, Chancy was under the impression that sampling of 100+ walleye last year was lethal; Ryan Kreiner was able to point out that these walleye were processed for data and then released.

The group adjourned, agreeing that the process is off to a good start.....

Scoping comment summary by Kenny Breidinger

Summary of comments received during the scoping period (October/November 2014) for FWP's proposal to Investigate Suppression of Walleye in Noxon Reservoir.

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| # of people raising this concern | Issue raised |
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| 1 | Poisons should be used to remove walleye followed by restocking of desirable species. |
| 1 | A general history of walleye in Noxon Reservoir should be included in the revised draft EA. |
| 1 | The role public opinion will play in the decision notice should be included in the EA. |
| 1 | Comment indicating support for the project. (No issues raised) |
| 7 | Comment indicating opposition for the project. (No issues raised) |
| 1 | Walleye suppression should only be pursued if perch, bass and pike are also suppressed. |
| 1 | Fisherman should be educated about walleye angling opportunities. |
| 1 | Resources should be used to improve access to Noxon Reservoir. |
| 1 | The use of purse seines should be used in place of gill nets to avoid lethal by catch |
| 4 | The economic impacts of the proposed alternative should be analyzed as well as the no action alternative. |
| 1 | Impact to the long-term recovery of native fish if walleye are continued to be able to be present at growing numbers in Noxon Reservoir, as well as if they are allowed to expand throughout the state. |
| 1 | Impact to the long-term recovery of sport fishing for native species if walleye are continued to be able to be present at growing numbers in Noxon Reservoir, as well as if they are allowed to expand throughout the state. |
| 1 | Impacts to the local economy if a world class native trout population is restored. |
| 1 | Recommendations on how FWP could prevent future illegal fish introductions - in Noxon Reservoir and elsewhere. |
| 1 | The role of predatory birds in Noxon reservoir should be analyzed. |
| 1 | Management actions should be based on comments received from the public. |

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| | (Each comment is a vote) |
| 3 | Pikeminnow in Noxon Reservoir are a problem that needs to be addressed or more info is needed about the reservoir pike minnow population. |
| 2 | The use of angling pressure to suppress the population should be analyzed. |
| 2 | The document should contain an explanation of why this level of analysis was completed. (EA vs. EIS) |
| 1 | The revised EA should include a full range of possible alternatives including a no action alternative. |
| 1 | The EA should evaluate the effectiveness of bull trout stocking |
| 1 | This project will not be successful based on lake trout suppression projects in other areas. |
| 1 | Information on funding sources should be included in the revised draft EA. |
| 1 | Information on bull trout recovery efforts in the area should be included in the document. |
| 1 | Information on gill net monitoring should be included in the revised draft EA. |
| 1 | The document should contain a plan to manage the reservoir as a warm water fishery. |
| 1 | Explanation of the impacts of the ESA and what would need to be changed or modified to allow FWP to better manage resources for the benefit of Montana citizens. |
| 1 | Examination of the impact of walleye young as forage. |
| 1 | The document should include an analysis of walleye spawning success |
| 1 | The document should include information on spawning in Cabinet Gorge Reservoir and verify that Noxon is the upstream extent of walleye distribution. |
| 1 | A non-political assessment using the best science now available and considering present relevant conditions to determine the validity of the blanket policy forbidding other than salmonid support anywhere west of the continental divide. |
| 1 | Attempt to measure the impact of walleye fishing through interviews or surveys of the regional fishing public and businesses. Review and include data |

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| | from enforcement personnel observations of walleye fishing. |
| 1 | Examination of the weed shelter quality, changes in that environment, impacts on recruitment and the health and stability of this element considering weed mitigation programs, environmental impacts, cyclical factors and general dam operation. |
| 1 | Examination of zooplankton levels and health, the existence of Mysis shrimp or other invaders and any other significant changes in factors impacting success of desirable species. |
| 2 | Analysis of predatory birds in Noxon Reservoir. |
| 1 | Assessment of the impacts of walleye retention for consumption including the impact on other species that are possibly not targeted or are generally released more often than in the past. |
| 1 | Information and counts on the catch of salmonids, endangered and otherwise, during the annual gill net surveys and other capture activities. Numbers for salmonids are not included in the recent reports and it appears that originally that data was collected and reported(Washington Water Power). |
| 1 | Explanation and assessment of the feasibility of suppression, the point of the revised EA, should include consideration of the rules requiring or recommending action relative to unauthorized introductions with examination of the sustainable populations confirmed downstream and other factors that may make suppression optional rather a mandate. |
| 1 | Confirmation and full disclosure supporting the FWP representation that there was in fact an illegal introduction and not an unauthorized or accidental introduction of walleye. Alternatively, determination that the introduction should be designated other than illegal. |
| 1 | Examination of the full spectrum of causes for changes in the population and quality of all fish species and forage sources(crayfish, insects, etc.) in the system with emphasis on desirable species. For example, perch appear to have moved from stunted overpopulation to an increased size and lower numbers; crayfish numbers are reportedly much lower; small northern pike seem to be more abundant. |
| 1 | Examination of the impacts to Noxon/Cabinet/LPO of passing certain species such as pike minnows upstream at the Thompson Dam. |
| 1 | Assessment in the changes and risks to the reservoir that are related to the removal of Milltown Dam including siltation and a possible increase in |

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| | contaminants/pollutants from that source as well as others suggested recently to include Stone Container. |
| 1 | Support the FWP representation that Noxon will supply a ready source of walleye leading Montanans to transplant the species elsewhere or alternatively, recognize that the existence of the fishery may satisfy the regional population by providing a unique resource offering warm water species. |
| 1 | Impact of brown and brook trout on spawning success of bull trout. |
| 1 | There is overwhelming public opposition to this project. |
| 1 | Decisions about this project should be based upon local opinion. |
| 1 | Sampling/killing 200-250 walleye annually for data gathering is unacceptable. |
| 1 | FWP's policy on walleye west of the divide needs to be changed. |
| 1 | NWWFA's 14 page comment sheet on the initial draft EA was submitted as scoping comments. |
| 1 | A pesticide general permit will be required if pesticides are used in Noxon Reservoir. |
| 1 | Public controversy over a site-specific suppression effort should not dictate what is done for our native fish. |
| 1 | FWP should work with the Communications/Education Division to determine the best way to handle "messaging" around suppression activities. |
| 1 | The document should contain the results of a pole taken to determine support for walleye suppression by licensed anglers. |

Information/Analysis by CAC Subcommittee Members

From Paul Fielder:

Hello John,

The three of us on the Thompson Falls sub-committee of the Noxon Reservoir sub-committee of the CAC had what I thought was a very productive meeting to discuss the issues of the Noxon Walleye EA which merit emphasis as that analysis moves forward. We three (Ken Breidinger, Larry Lack, and myself) met in my living room for a few hours Monday afternoon because my recent leg surgery still prohibits me from traveling to meetings (or much else). I greatly appreciate Ken and Larry meeting with me at my home so I could remain most involved as the Noxon Walleye EA process moves forward with its sub-committee meeting Wednesday, prior to the CAC meeting later that evening. Additionally, Ken is

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making arrangements so that I can conference call into that subcommittee meeting. Most accommodating!!!

This afternoon we identified 5 major groupings of comments/concerns which the “Summary of Comments Received during the Scoping Period” seemed to provide. Ken had put together a 4 page list of the issues raised and number of people raising that concern. I numbered those issues from 1-53. Then I grouped/clumped the most similar ones into subgroups, omitting the ones that seemed less relevant to the EA and tallying the total number of people raising the concerns within that clumped group. For each group/clump I identified the individual concerns (number 1-53) that were included within that group/clump. Ken and Larry now also have copies of that exercise. Unfortunately, I had to use Ken’s “Summary of Comments” table and do my numbering, clumping, and tallying in handwriting and it is not in an electronic or e-mailable format to e-mail. My impression of that summary is below.

The 5 major groupings of comments/concerns and total number of people raising the comments/concerns in that grouping were:

- 1 Public opinion should be considered/ignored in the decision process and public support for/against the plan should be addressed in the EA. (18 total people)
- 2 Use the public fishermen as the walleye suppression means and gather population information about walleye (and other species) from fishermen during creel censuses, fishing derbies, tagged fish reward programs, walleye fishing education, and no restrictions on walleye daily catch or size limits. This would have license buying fishermen being the ones catching and keeping walleye (instead of MFW&P biologists) and would gain local support in keeping walleye numbers low. (5 total people).
- 3 EA should analyze feasibility of continuing to try to improve a trout fishery in Noxon Reservoir which has undergone limnological changes after it was dammed and turned from a cold water river habitat into a warmer water reservoir habitat. (5 total people)
- 4 EA should analyze the financial impact (of suppression vs no action) on the local communities along and immediately upstream and downstream of Noxon Reservoir. Caution was urged that a very unbiased consultant conduct this financial analysis so the local public does not perceive that the consultant’s results were “bought and paid for”. (5 total people)
- 5 The EA should analyze the role of the Northern Pikeminnow population as a predatory species in Noxon Reservoir because this species comprises such a large proportions of the reservoir’s fish population, grows to large size, thrives in river habitats that have become impounded into reservoir habitats, and States west of Montana conduct extensive walleye removal problems to protect salmonids from pikeminnow predation. (4 people)

I wish I could be at the meetings in Kalispell to further participate in this Noxon Walleye issue, but my leg injury prohibits that for a while. The accommodations that Larry and Ken have made to include my participation are truly and greatly appreciated. Paul C Fielder – Member Region 1 CAC

From Larry Lack:

First I'd like to say, Never having had to do an E A, that I believe this E A is reasonably well done. I don't see many people are going to read a small portion of this let alone the entire document.

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The issues I see, some mentioned in the scoping some not, are as follows:

The economic impact. This has to be the number one concern. People and businesses have put a lot of effort, time and money into bringing fishermen into the area. They have developed functions, provided facilities and planned alternative activities for non-fishing persons. That generates a lot of money for the communities.

We really don't know the effect of walleyes on Bull trout and Cutthroat trout. We are mandated to protect these fish.

There is an ongoing project to control aquatic invasive plants in the reservoir. It is probably hurting the existing fish population. What does it do to the walleyes? What effect does that have on zooplankton which is essential for larval and immature walleyes?

The pit falls that will cause us the most trouble will be negativity and emotion. We need to stay positive and factual.

Public outreach, O.L.O.C.! Walleye Weekly! Avoid long drawn out articles. Regular, short reports and informational write ups.

Ryan K: overview of status of EA process

Scoping process in Oct and Nov to take more public comment. Expect new EA to come out by Winter 2014. Predictive model of what fishery will look like. 1 = with Walleye, 1 = with removal of Walleye. This EA is a very controversial issue.

Comments from others re: Sub committee report?

Leo – Canyon Ferry is similar scenario, have there been any formal studies on the economic impact to Canyon Ferry?

Ryan K – Will do comparison with recent Canyon Ferry scenario.

Bernie Cassidy – if we're going to stock our streams in violation of policy...stock them all and may the best fish win.

Update from Commissioner:

The biennial season setting process is a huge undertaking.

- Starts with scoping meetings
- Tentative proposals presented to Commission
- 43 public meetings held throughout State
- Based on public input, proposals are then modified before finalized

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- More Elk B tags issued
- Elk B tag cannot shoot Bull Elk in same hunting district that B tag was valid
- Great majority of Mule Deer tags reduced
- Increased opportunity of Turkeys
- Male sub-quotas on Mountain Lion harvest

Whitefish River – City of WF requesting non-motorized traffic on 3 miles of WF River. Commission has accepted that this proposal go out for rule-making.

Flathead Lake work-session:

FWP presented to Commission in January. In February, CSKT presented their take on same situation, 2 different interpretations.

FWP – Bull trout kept at stable/secure population.

CSKT – Bull trout should be increased.

Tribe made it clear that they intend to proceed with netting. FWP needs to decide what it's going to do.

Swan Lake Lake Trout Removal Project is kind of like a pilot project to netting Flathead Lake. *Leo should be asked to give presentation to CAC.

Swan Lake is 1:30 scale to Flathead Lake.

Lee Anderson: R1 Enforcement Report

Chancy – great group of wardens in our region.

Gary – to Lee – any idea of what the total poaching take is in NW Montana?

Round Table:

Mike Corkish: It is amazing how little MT's pay for licenses. It is important to get people to know how good Montanans have it.

Larry Lack: People with hunting/fishing citations have outfitter licenses in Sanders County.

Greg Foley: Acquisition of 40 acres in Lewistown area by RME has opened up hunting opportunities.

Wally: RE: Noxon – what are the future impacts to reservoir?

Leo: Ungulate roadkill statistics – trying to get his hands on this info.

Bob Lawson: Re: feeding critters – FWP could do a better job with making it clear what you can and cannot feed.

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Bernie: Tammie and Phil are doing a good job up in Libby.

Next meeting: TBA....Around April 8th

Gary Wolfe / closing comment:

When I went through the season setting process I realized how truly blessed we are here in Montana with our long hunting seasons in comparison to many other states.