

FINDING COMMON GROUND TO SUSTAIN FISH AND WILDLIFE:
Discussion on Improving Fish and Wildlife for the Future
June 10, 2015

Meeting Summary

Welcome

Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Director, Jeff Hagener, welcomed the meeting participants and thanked them for their interest and attendance. He explained that this is the second meeting of the group discussing this topic (most of the June 10 participants met in October of 2014). It is an important element for the future of the Department.

Sustainable funding for fish and wildlife is not just an issue for Montana; other states are grappling with this same issue. How do we sustain fish and wildlife in Montana? FWP is responsible for all fish and wildlife resources across the state. There are additional constituents, but we don't want to attract new constituents and in the process unintentionally the alienate hunters and anglers who currently support the agency.

Participants around the table and members of the public in the audience introduced themselves. Each of the invitees received a packet with an agenda, notes from the October 2014 meeting, and a draft Finding Common Ground to Sustain Fish and Wildlife - Overview for the work of this group.

Finding Common Ground to Sustain Fish and Wildlife - Overview

The Department prepared a draft overview of this effort for discussion by the committee members. The group started working through the sections beginning with the first paragraph, "What is Finding Common Ground to Sustain Fish and Wildlife?"

While there seemed to be a relatively high level of comfort with this language overall, the group made a number of points to clarify the language and a few suggestions of items that may be missing from the draft language. The group did not reach consensus on the language in this or any other sections in the draft Overview.

The following questions were raised and points made about this introductory paragraph:

- Do we need to recognize Montana's hunting heritage right up front in this paragraph? A key to success is knowing the history of wildlife management in the U.S.
- Is there a sense of urgency to this work? If yes, it should be expressed up front.
- What is meant by "common ground?" It does not mean we share the same political views. Should be clear to anybody that hasn't directly participated in the discussion, vocabulary is important.
- Should the stakeholders of this effort include a geographic scope beyond Montana? National?

- What is the federal role in sustaining Montana's fish and wildlife?
- What does the term "support" mean? It should be more than funding.

The discussion then became a more general exploration of what this work to sustain fish and wildlife is about. Below are the points that were made during the free-flowing discussion. The points are listed in the order they were made rather than grouped by topic so that they have not been interpreted. In some cases, these points represent the opinions or thoughts of an individual. There was no attempt to dissect each and every statement nor was there an attempt to secure consensus on the following.

- This isn't about state vs. federal government, but best management.
- Capital Sports has generated approximately \$4.75 million of P-R and D-J funding through sales of items with an excise tax and generated \$5.4 million in license dollar sales through the sale of hunting and fishing licenses over the 45-year time period the store has been in business.
- This group has the potential to lead the way.
- Does anyone disagree that when we say "broaden" we don't mean to step away from the hunting and fishing heritage?
- Do we need to broaden beyond Montana citizens? We have a national constituency.
- We don't want to defend against interests from outside Montana. Don't want to give up our control.
- Realistically, non-residents bring high economic value to Montana (look at non-resident license dollars).
- I am uncomfortable negotiating the common interest of our huntable wildlife with groups who are committed to having federal management/control of wildlife versus state management/control.
- The hunting heritage community has done amazing work.
- We need to be explicit in our assumptions.
- The conservation community (those at the table) respect the hunting heritage. Everyone at the table is a conservationist.
- Wildlife tourism is a huge contributor to Montana's economy. Tourism is #2 and outfitting and guiding is a very important piece under tourism.
- People don't want to lose something.
- There is a mistrust among some people at the table. Need to build trust and focus on that.
- Many landowners wouldn't support additional funds for FWP. How we talk about this is important.
- There needs to be more emphasis on the landowners' perspectives in these discussions.
- We would be wise to be thinking bigger than Montana. Federal government provides habitat and National Parks draw many people to our state.
- FWP enjoys broad support. The last session was a "war." Issues that happen elsewhere move across states and can affect Montana.
- We need to base management on science.
- Our group needs to work to get support for adequate funding.

After a significant amount of discussion on the draft Overview, Director Hagener provided an update on several items relevant to the conversation. The national Blue Ribbon Panel held their first meeting to look at this issue. The first meeting looked primarily at what has been tried. The Pitman-Robertson (P-R) and Dingle-Johnson (D-J) model has been very successful. (These programs take money from a federal excise tax and distribute it to the states which must come up with local match.) The recommendations and results from this national effort are still many years away and will need action from the U.S. Congress. If a similar program to help fund the needs associated with non-game species comes to pass in the future, Montana will likely have to come up with matching funds from some source other than hunting and fishing licenses. The funding that Montana receives from D-J has stabilized. Funding through P-R to Montana has been increasing but state matching dollars are still required before increased PR can be made available.

House Bill 140, the “license fee increase bill”, will go into effect during the next license year with associated revenues flowing to the Department the following year, fiscal year 2017. FWP license revenue matched with federal excise tax funds is FWP’s primary source of funding. Money for the Aquatic Invasive Species program is the only money FWP receives for fish and wildlife management from Montana’s general fund. The last license fee increase occurred in 2005. Funding has been on a 10-year cycle. Under HB140, the funding cycle will go from 10 years to 4 years.

FWP’s total budget is around \$75 million. About \$5 million of that is spent on endangered species management. FWP reduced its budget by \$1.4 million annually during the last biennium. Additionally, as mandated by the legislature, all state agencies reduced their number of staff positions or Fulltime Equivalents (FTEs.) For FWP this was 20.5 FTEs. On top of that, state agencies must create another 2% vacancy savings (holding positions vacant rather than filling them right away.) Doing all of these things will enable the Department to remain adequately funded and maintain current services until 2021. FWP will need to review its financial status and determine whether there will be a need to request additional funding in the 2019 session. Jeff asked the question “How many times do we go back to the traditional sportsmen for more money?” He explained that in more populated states, licenses can sell for a modest price and still generate large amounts of revenue for fish and wildlife.

Participant Question: Why can’t people contribute money now?

Discussion: people can use the non-game check-off but these voluntary mechanisms tend to tail off over time and not produce sustainable revenue, people could also buy a conservation license (required for hunting and fishing licenses.) Bottom line, it’s not been in our culture to donate money to government agencies. Everyone in Montana watches wildlife but this doesn’t show in FWP’s revenues. How do we collectively re-invest our citizens in wildlife? There is a huge gap in education and understanding. Many private groups do contribute back to habitat and in other ways.

Some believed the group should begin discussing potential funding mechanisms and others felt we shouldn’t get hung up on the mechanism now. First, we need to build support and the funding will follow. Hunters identify a good value and we need to expand this concept and broaden the customer base—get others, in addition to hunters, passionate about supporting fish

and wildlife. Members asked, what is the funding gap we have for FWP? What could be done with additional revenues?

The group took a break from discussion of the Overview, agreeing to set it aside at least temporarily, to hear a presentation.

Avoiding a House Divided: Fish and Wildlife Values, moving past false divides, seeing common ground (Presentation by Dave Chadwick, MWF)

This presentation was previously given as part of a panel at the North American Wildlife Conference. Dave showed several slides and facilitated discussion between the slides.

Dave believes that common ground is there. We don't need to create it, we just need to uncover it. 18.5% of Montanans are hunters according to FWP license sales. Other research puts this at from 15-49%. Being a hunter is about an identity and not limited only to annual participation. The term "non-consumptive" goes back several decades. In reality, everyone, even wildlife watchers are consumptive. And, even "hunter" and "non-hunter" are not black and white labels. There is a big overlap in hunters and wildlife viewers. In Montana the majority overlap. People who hunt do so not only for harvest. Seeing animals whether they successfully harvest one affects the hunter experience. Motivations and satisfaction are similar between hunters and wildlife viewers. Landowners and habitat create opportunities for both. In Montana, ranchers are conservationists in the sense that they care for the land, which in turn provides habitat for wildlife. Many landowners also hunt and view wildlife. Studies show that people who both hunt and watch birds participate very strongly in conservation behaviors. In a survey of the western states, all but 13% of those residents surveyed are people who care about wildlife. In Montana, 94% of those surveyed believe it is important to protect fish and wildlife habitat.

Three examples of programs for non-hunttable species come from Missouri, Arkansas, and the federal government. What started as a non-game effort developed strong, diverse support and resulted in dedicating funds from a sales tax in Missouri. Both residents and non-residents contribute. In Arkansas, sales tax dollars were obtained for fish and wildlife through a ballot initiative. First needs such as more game wardens were identified, then support developed. A third example is called Teaming with Wildlife. This federal initiative built on the success of P-R and D-J and addresses the needs of species not covered by those programs. Dave pointed out that what works elsewhere may not work in Montana. Several efforts have failed and represent good lessons to learn from. We need to come up with our own solutions. He believes that if the needs can be identified and the case made and broad support built, the mechanism and funding will follow.

Meeting Agenda Revised

After the challenging discussion of the morning, the group agreed with a suggestion to back up and talk about why this is hard and revisit whether there is value in this effort and whether it should continue. From David Chadwick's presentation, 94% of Montanans support conservation and management of wildlife habitat—so why is this discussion on sustaining fish and wildlife so hard?

Committee members were asked to answer the question “Why is this hard?” from their own viewpoint. Each person gave their answer. There was significantly more agreement than disagreement in the individual answers to this question.

- There is a lot of history with people represented here. Everyone is passionate about this and there is a wide range of understanding.
- Lack of trust is present.
- Fear of losing something, giving something up. Uncertainty.
- Perception by the hunting community that this is a take-over of wildlife by those who do not hunt..
- There are things that divide us.
- Misunderstandings such as the wolf stamp and on other issues.
- Fear of hidden agendas, not being heard by decision-makers. Misunderstandings about decision-making.
- There has been a traditional way of doing things. This represents change and uncertainty.
- Discussions have been happening for a long time. Lack of urgency.
- Going to have to be uncomfortable to have these discussions—for something to happen.
- Fear by current constituents of losing something. Fear of not being included/accepted.
- Assumptions about motives and values.
- Need for education.
- Lack of communication by all involved, by opposing sides, among constituents and agencies? It’s necessary to get there and difficult to do.
- User groups are “set” in their views.
- Trust issues. How we communicate with each other. Need to talk and listen.
- Conflicting values. Perception of loss.
- Complexity of the issues. Complexity of the species to be managed. Complexity of the impacts of decisions on constituents.
- This involves a culture and lifestyle that I love. Protective of it.
- History and trust. Past litigation. Disingenuous behavior. Hard to get past.
- Potential for political posturing. Creates division.
- Complex issues are not amenable to simple solutions.
- Change. The Department’s issues have evolved. Used to be just hunting and fishing. Now dealing with many other things such as endangered species. The landscape of Montana is changing too.
- Lack of trust. Complexity.
- Protecting turf.
- Can’t define “this”—it’s a big broad concept. No one supports 100% of what FWP does.
- Trust with FWP.
- Tendency for issues to escalate, blow up. Volatility with social media. Rhetoric.
- Concerned with protecting my values.
- Science is not all pure, can be bought.
- Problem requires legislative approval. Lengthy and political process.
- Importance and emphasis on North American model of fish and wildlife management.

What might come from this effort?

After identifying the reasons this is hard work and vulnerable to failure, the group pondered how to satisfy these concerns. There was discussion about the best way forward—whether that would be to start into the work of listing possible funding mechanisms or some other course. They continued to ask about work FWP does now, what is being delivered and what needs and opportunities there are that additional funding could contribute to. What does the group think FWP should be doing? Once that is established, support can be fostered. But need to frame in the right scale—not detailed budgets or program specifics. They agreed with each other that talking and listening in the way that had been occurring this morning was helping to address some of the concerns listed above related to trust and understanding. No one expressed disagreement with the idea that common ground is possible. How much common ground there is can't be known at this point. The common ground would be around support for FWP. People want wildlife in their lives.

The group spent a few minutes talking about possible outcomes from Finding Common Ground and what success would look like. Most suggested they would like to see some kind of practical recommendation or set of recommendations that would support funding for FWP and that the group members could agree with. Participants expressed that the status quo was not the best outcome and that recommendations would likely call for some type of change. To be successful, any effort that comes from this group will have to recognize and value the hunting heritage of Montana.

Possible Funding Mechanisms

The group decided it would be productive to brainstorm ideas on funding mechanisms. The list below consists of ideas suggested by participants; the ideas were not analyzed or evaluated. They are simply preliminary ideas for further consideration by the group, listed in the order offered.

- Pay for employee benefits from the general fund (Wyoming did this)
- Establish a voluntary stamp or decal created by administrative rule available to anyone. Use the funds to support existing programs.
- Expand use of the conservation license and make it a requirement for wildlife viewing, tourists, etc. One way to do this might be to require a conservation license for guided wildlife viewing. Require for National Park visitors and/or broaden to include other uses such as dude ranch patrons.
- State lottery income
- Taxes—new or existing (gas tax, accommodations' tax, excise tax, energy tax, real estate transfer tax, redirect an existing tax)
- Establish a user fee for fishing access sites
- Look at existing fees to see what could be raised
- Establish a “recreation license” and figure out how to require it (similar to conservation license which is already required for hunters and anglers)
- Make it easier for people to make voluntary contributions. Look at how non-profits raise funds.

- Develop a means to designate how funds are used. (Not being able to tell potential donors what their funds will be used for can inhibit fund-raising. People don't want their money to be used for things they don't support.)
- Establish a natural resource trust fund (Wyoming has this) where general funds are used for natural resource projects
- Two avenues to consider; mechanisms that generate dollars directly to the Department and/or that generate dollars to a foundation that helps the Department
- Severance tax on resource extraction
- Boat launch user fee (BLM has this)
- Public referendum as the means to establish whatever mechanism is selected.

2015 and Forward

FWP's Charlie Sperry explained that the Department has a mission statement. (The group looked at this at their first meeting.) The vision and goals under that mission were last updated in the 1990's. There has been a great deal of change between then and now—including many of the Department's employees. Good for new generation of employees to experience a visioning process. FWP has started an internal dialogue about who we serve and how we operate. Later in the process they will be involving the public in this conversation. Charlie encouraged this group to be thinking about how they might contribute to this visioning effort in the coming months. He will give an update on the 2015 and Forward work at the next meeting of Finding Common Ground.

Public Comment

This meeting was announced on the Department's website. The meeting agenda contained an item for public comment. Public comment was invited at 2:45 p.m. Four individuals offered comments. Comments are paraphrased below in the order they were received.

Rod Bullis

Montana is ecologically connected to the lands outside its borders (migratory birds, fish, etc.) We're here for the greater good and should be proud. Unprecedented times, need to define how to move forward with new challenges. Some believe that what we have now is so good that they see no need to become actively involved in management issues.

Kim Bean (Wolves of the Rockies)

Remember the KISS principle, keep it simple stupid. FWP needs sustainable funding. We won't all see eye to eye on how it is allocated. We need to discuss possible mechanisms and build from that. Non-traditional interests want the opportunity to be heard, put our money on the table, and know where my money is going.

Rhonda Lanier (Wolves of the Rockies)

Rhonda said she is concerned that she has not heard the term "non-lethal" used today.

Robert Aronson

You are trying to reinvent the wheel and it's not necessary. Create more access and more animals. We need predator control. Create more opportunity. Get back with the mission.

Jonathan Proctor (Defenders of Wildlife)

Believes his organization may be misunderstood. The Defenders of Wildlife has 5,000 Montana members. The membership is very diverse and contains both hunters and non-hunters. They are not out to stop hunting. They would like FWP to have resources to maintain healthy populations. They prefer the state to manage fish and wildlife and work to prevent the need to list species as endangered or threatened.

Wrap-up

The group listed the following ideas as potential topics for presentations at future meetings. The list was not prioritized.

- Role of fish and wildlife in Montana's tourism economy (Norma Nickerson from the Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, U.M. might be a resource)
- High level overview of FWP's programs and budget
- FWP's 2015 and Forward visioning initiative
- Issues and revenue trends likely to affect FWP in the future
- Department ideas for additional funding mechanisms
- Additional polling results (about values, motivations, activities, etc.)
- Overview on FWP needs over the next 5 to 10 to 15 years.

At the first meeting, Director Hagener asked participants if they would be willing to help fund this effort. Participants had agreed to cover their own expenses to attend meetings. Several also offered to chip in money. FWP's Charlie Sperry explained that it would be acceptable for anyone or group to write a check to FWP. The Department is not able to speak to the tax situation and potential donors were encouraged to contact their own tax experts about whether the donation would be tax deductible. Charlie agreed to send more detailed information to the participants regarding donations.

FWP is planning for 5-6 meetings over the next 18 months. The meetings can be held in different locations. The group decided to hold the next meeting in Missoula. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation will host the meeting. The target date is mid-August. Charlie will send out some choices for dates soon. He will also send out everyone's contact information. With this he will give a response due date for comments on the draft Overview. Charlie will compile these comments so that the group can move more quickly through the discussion of the Overview at the next meeting.

Participants liked the short presentation at this meeting and would appreciate more of that type of information at future meetings.

Director Hagener thanked everyone for their participation. He is hoping good solutions on how to fund the agency into the future will come from this effort.