

FINDING COMMON GROUND:
Discussion on Improving Fish and Wildlife for the Future
Meeting Summary
October 28, 2014

Welcome

FWP Director, Jeff Hagener, welcomed the meeting participants and thanked them for their interest and attendance. He introduced Lieutenant Governor, Angela McLean.

Lt. Governor McLean began by referencing the administration's Main Street Montana Project. Montana's fish, wildlife, and recreation resources are a part of the Main Street Project to strengthen Montana's economy and provide jobs. Fish, wildlife and recreation are important to hunters and visitors that enjoy watching wildlife, viewing the state's scenery, and tourism. The Lt. Governor thanked everyone for finding the time to participate in this discussion. Working together is a hallmark of Governor Bullock. The wolf stamp process generated 50,000 comments from a wide array of interests. Montana is changing, and we expect a great deal from our fish and wildlife managers—who must deal with the conflicts. These are healthy conversations and the level of interest and caring is not lost on the Governor. Lt. Governor McLean applauded this process of listening to each other and believes it will have application for future generations. She believes that as Montanans there is more that unites us than divides us. The administration will look forward to the results of the conversation and appreciates the willingness of those participating to develop a Montana made vision. Her door is always open and she would welcome a visit, a phone call, or an e-mail.

Participants around the table introduced themselves. Please see list of participants at the end of this meeting summary. Director Hagener went over the purpose of the meeting explaining the three meeting objectives below. He and the Department staff are here to listen to the discussion, the thoughts, and the advice of this group.

Meeting Objectives

- 1) Discuss what happened with the wolf stamp process, why the decision has been made not to proceed, and learn from the process.
- 2) Explore what FWP's mission means to a range of interests.
- 3) Obtain participants' advice on a conversation about meeting various interests' expectations in carrying out the Department's fish and wildlife mission.

Director Hagener explained that sustainable funding for fish and wildlife departments is not just an issue for Montana. License buyers have supported fish and wildlife management over time through license purchases and also equipment and gear purchases. Through federal legislation that has been in place for many decades, these gear purchases have been taxed and the tax dollars are then returned to the states.

Over time, expressed interest in fish and wildlife has broadened to include people in addition to license buyers. FWP is honored with the fish, wildlife and recreation resources we have in Montana and envied by many other states. As these interests in fish and wildlife management have evolved there are more people wanting to “come to the table”. How do we do this moving forward?

Management of these resources takes funding. License fees and the excise taxes make up approximately 90% of the Department’s budget now. The Department does not receive any general fund monies, yet there are new programs (often directed by the legislature) and 60-some earmarked funds. Access was a huge issue during the last legislative session.

There is activity on the national level in the form of a Blue Ribbon Panel, and there have been ideas for federal legislation. Other states have taken a variety of approaches to fund their state fish and wildlife agencies--from dedicating general fund revenues to sales tax funds. The Conservation and Reinvestment Act known as CARA was proposed, but not passed, in the U.S. Congress. Jeff provided a handout on the Blue Ribbon Panel. Results from the work of the panel will likely take several years and Jeff believes that Montana need not wait for the Blue Ribbon Panel, and can be a leader on this issue of agency funding in the meantime.

Wolf Stamp Debriefing

Director Hagener kicked off the discussion by saying he believes the attempt to institute a voluntary wolf stamp in Montana was not a failure, but a difficult conversation and the start of a good discussion. Approximately 50,000 comments were received—most were form letters and most supported the wolf stamp. The Department ultimately decided not to proceed with the stamp because they believed that while the concept was very good, this particular proposal didn’t go far enough and because some of the language in the proposal was problematic in terms of directing specific management. FWP has five dedicated wolf management specialists—more than for any other species. He simply did not see that the wolf stamp would be helpful. No one during this process argued against the concept of non-license buyers contributing financial support, but contributions on an individual species basis and additional earmarked monies are difficult to manage.

The following bullet points capture the group’s discussion on the wolf stamp idea. While many of the points were points of general agreement, they should be viewed only as individual opinions stated while exploring the issue.

- This conversation is super important. The diversity we have here is impressive.
- Comments during the wolf stamp process showed 95% supported the concept of non-consumptive users being able to contribute financially.
- Disappointed that the wolf stamp was rejected and now we must start over rather than modify what we developed.
- There is a perception that the conservation community has not been invited to the table and that conservation is a dirty word. There is no desire by the conservation community

to strike at hunters or agricultural producers. Was this a management or a conservation stamp? Does management = hunting? Conservation interests aren't identified as stakeholders in wolf season setting. Dedicated wolf specialists may be appropriate due to the complexity of issues. Annual stamp or general stamp would be OK.

- Encouraged about this type of meeting. Need to get it right the first time. There are differences in what the word "conservation" means to people. Heard opposition to a species specific stamp because all wildlife are connected. Need to maintain flexibility in management.
- Audubon was involved in getting the non-game check-off legislation passed. The non-game check-off generates \$25,000 per year and took several legislative sessions. At the time there was a perception that this would shut down the hunting industry
- The wolf stamp could be likened to a lightning bolt striking a box of TNT. There are three pieces to this challenge 1) what is the best way to manage or conserve? 2) this is a government process where decisions have to be made on who to involve and how to move ahead, and 3) the most important challenge that we need to work together to address in a sustainable way is how to pay for fish and wildlife management and conservation
- Consumptive vs non-consumptive users is not helpful terminology (this comment was made repeatedly.) We need new and different words to use.
- Support some type of funding mechanism, people should have to buy a conservation license. Dad used to say "If you are not at the table, you are on the menu." We are seeing an unrelenting march towards privatization and commercialization of wildlife. We represent a broad constituency and Montana can and must be a leader on this.
- The funding mechanism is the key issue. Past success is based on having a valuable commodity that could be sold (licenses.) Concerned with a high level of early support for something like a wolf stamp and then a drop-off because this is a less tangible good. Would people poach a viewing opportunity? General fund dollars would be the most straight forward solution.
- There is danger in looking at the general fund. License funds were intended to get politics out of fish and wildlife management and it is creeping back in.
- Don't promote a concept that won't last long term. Wolf stamp puts a focus (perhaps not a helpful focus for greater acceptance) on one species. Should blend with other species.
- The real issue is the future of the agency. Wildlife will suffer if the agency does. Need to put away labels and get to the funding model. FWP is a \$60 million a year business with a customer base.
- All of us are beneficiaries of fish and wildlife through the public trust.
- Agricultural producers were concerned with specific language in the proposal and were not in favor of a species specific approach. The approach needs to be much broader.
- Sustainability was a concern with the wolf stamp. Disappointed it didn't move forward, but grateful for this discussion and the people involved. Non-consumptive people are needed too.
- Wolves are a very sensitive issue and require a careful approach. Proceed thoughtfully with expanding who pays for fish and wildlife management. Talking about the Department's mission and who needs to be involved is a good place to start. There are

many examples of mechanisms to use—there have been successes—after thoughtful discussion of the mission.

- There is also opportunity to utilize private funds for fish and wildlife work.
- The Licensing and Funding Advisory Council (LFAC) looked at the funding cycle and future funding needs and has a recommendation going forward to the legislature. The LFAC did discuss this issue of non-consumptive user participation in funding but did not develop a recommendation. People at the table need to work cooperatively rather than using litigation. The stakeholders are interconnected. Don't want the wolf stamp/non-consumptive user issue or proposals to derail the effort already underway to address Department funding through the LFAC proposal.
- The wolf stamp effort has had a positive outcome—we are here today. We need to think more broadly and long term to engage the entire range of publics.

Conservation Kids

FWP showed a brief video where Montana youth were interviewed about the importance of conservation. Participants at the table repeatedly came back to the importance of this work for conserving fish and wildlife resources in order to provide opportunities for future generations. The desire is for future generation to enjoy opportunities similar to what we now enjoy. The video can be found on U Tube.

FWP's Mission

Director Hagener explained that the current mission statement was developed in the late 1990s. The Department now wants to look to 2015 and beyond. Three-quarters of the current employees have less than 15 years with FWP and were not involved in the 1990's effort.

The current mission statement reads:

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, through its employees and citizen commission, provides for the stewardship of the fish, wildlife, parks, and recreational resources of Montana, while contributing to the quality of life for present and future generations.

The participants chose to begin the discussion by making suggestions to this mission statement, the vision, and guiding principles as a way of addressing what is important to them. Considerations for updating the statements are captured below.

- Guests to Montana need to respect the custom and culture--including our wildlife.
- It is a continuing challenge to manage the resources with so much interest, the Department has a "to do" list that is always growing.
- The mission statement implies "we are taking care of it" and seems less collaborative

than what is actually occurring.

- It's important to keep the public trust doctrine in mind. The commissioners already listen to all Montanans, not just license buyers. Fish and wildlife are held in trust for all members of the public. License holders are recognized and appreciated for their financial contributions.
- Suggest adding language to the vision statement about preservation of habitat and working to maintain balance. Also acknowledge ecological importance and use of science.
- Add education and outreach to the vision statement.
- FWP looks at and protects habitat, not reflected here. Need to invest in this business.
- The agency manages resources for everybody. Do Department employees believe this? Do others believe this? Mission needs to reference science. FWP already uses science.
- Science informs, but does not make decisions. Need to include economics and social sciences in addition to biological science.
- Include the concept of public trust doctrine.
- The sentences need to be shortened and the statements written with the readers in mind.
- Need more emphasis on communications. It's hard to reach people and people get frustrated. This can be a source of misperception.
- Department needs to do more education—beyond hunter ed. Public involvement is not as effective as it should be.
- Describe what is being done.
- People have a personal responsibility to get involved, seek out information.
- FWP does value public engagement and we think they should.
- Add specific reference to heritage resources, pride in and conservation of these resources.

FWP's Constituents

The group had a discussion about the Department's constituents. Several important distinctions were pointed out between the words constituent, customer, consumer, and beneficiary. Key points made included:

- Constituents and who sees themselves as constituents are different things.
- Payers are viewed as constituents by the general public, perceptions are not accurate.
- There is a distinction between paying "customers" and constituents. The challenge is to make more constituents into customers.
- People that participate understand who funds the Department. There is economic value in wildlife tourism and these people pay in ways that support our economy other than through purchasing licenses.
- Wildlife watchers, hunters, agricultural producers, future constituents
- Not everyone has felt included.
- Who should manage the resources and who should pay?
- Past surveys indicate most Montanans think they should pay and most think they are already paying for fish and wildlife management
- Montanans identify with hunting and fishing culture whether they do it themselves or not

- Customers give money in exchange for something (license buyers)
- Consumers feed their families with meat. Consumers benefit by eating the food, but don't all purchase licenses. Consumers benefit from services provided by FWP.
- Every single Montanan is a constituent of FWP.
- Wildlife in trust doesn't mean FWP shouldn't pay its own way.
- Don't reduce all of this to a financial transaction.
- There are many users such as floaters and agricultural producers that benefit.
- The Montana Sportsman Alliance is developing a Montana Model of Conservation.
- Rural area businesses are very dependent on hunting seasons.

The group discussed how fish and wildlife could benefit from a broader more diverse funding base. Opinions expressed supported the idea of a broader, more diverse funding base because participants believe there would be a closer connection between people, FWP and the resources; the Department is currently underfunded and better funding would benefit everyone; skin in the game from a wide variety of people will contribute to success; perceptions about who the agency serves would improve; it would represent all Montanans more accurately; all species' needs would be addressed; and it's appropriate not to put all of the eggs in the basket of the legislature. Participants repeatedly expressed the opinion that they respected and did not wish to exclude or cut out the groups and individuals (primarily license buyers) that have traditionally been considered the primary stakeholders of the Department's decisions.

Exploring Interests

While the participants felt there was a great diversity present at this meeting, the group started this discussion by listing entities not present for the discussion that need to be included.

Non-traditional land owners	Land Trusts
Legislators	Wildlife Tourism
More landowner presence	Citizen scientists
Livestock loss board	Biologists and researchers
Public land managers	Youth and school curriculum
Tourism interests	Commercial outfitters
Trapping and anti-trapping interests	Tribes
Business community	Non-affiliated individual Montanans

General discussion followed about exploring interests. These are the points that were made.

- The state agency model has long-term future sportsman/hunting culture.
- Interested in preserving both the wildlife and opportunities associated with it for kids.
- Interested in maintaining public and publicly-available wildlife.
- Protect Montana's authority over fish and wildlife.
- State parks' has a different view of habitat.
- National groups' interests in Montana wildlife.
- Want reasonable win-win solutions
- Retain existing opportunities

- Diversify who is at the table
- Well managed and funded wildlife agency
- Believe wildlife has an intrinsic value
- Sound management to continue to provide opportunities
- Be ahead of and plan for growth (specifically land uses, habitat impacts, values)
- Can't afford to go to sleep at the switch—opportunities are in danger, other agendas
- Building relationships across the landscape
- Keep interests talking to each other
- Connection between outdoor heritage and the economy
- Montana has the Montana Environmental Protection Act, a good asset

Common Interests

The group had a general discussion on interests in common. The following statements captured the key points of the discussion, but once again the group did not vote or intend these to be consensus statements.

Wildlife is important to future generations of Montana. Our values unite us and there are more things that unite us than divide us. Montana is a unique place with unique and special resources and we don't want to lose what we care about. FWP is a steward for our fish and wildlife and we want the agency to be adequately funded, alive and well. A healthy FWP benefits all interests—and allows them to be a full partner with landowners. FWP needs to manage all wildlife for everyone. We need to begin to plan beyond the current model and this will take many years. This is a great opportunity and it comes with big challenges. We all do care and fighting against each other causes everyone to lose. Montana crafted solutions are the best and longest lasting ones.

General Observations from this Meeting

- There are lots of common interests. We have the seeds to continue.
- We want to be sensitive to the interplay between this work and the LFAC's recommendations. We want to support, not jeopardize the work of that group.
- Don't let this work languish.
- The legislators are our representatives, how do we change?
- We need to recognize the value of the Department's constituents.
- Any results of the Blue Ribbon Panel's work are likely to be years out. If their work generates more federal dollars for fish and wildlife, Montana may have to come up with additional match to access those federal funds. Montana needs to track those efforts.
- The business model of FWP needs to expand to generate new revenue while being careful not to alienate the existing customer base. Be aware of what sportsmen believe they could be losing.
- The participants here today can spread the word and write about this effort from their own perspectives.
- Actions of interests from outside Montana can damage perceptions.
- We should honor traditional agency constituents and add to that with additional interests.

- Blue Ribbon Panel idea would be good for Montana too.
- A Montana-based solution would have an easier time in the legislature.

Challenges to Success of this Effort

- Perceptions of what someone might lose or give up.
- Perceptions damaged by outside interests.
- EQC authority and policies.
- Other issues FWP is dealing with, whether perceived as related to this one or not.
- Lack of information and communication.
- Not being able to get all interests involved.
- Lack of a pragmatic approach to change.
- Specific language and words used. They need to be inclusive and build trust.
- Process needs to be transparent with accurate information that is widely distributed.
- Conflicts: they need to be addressed as soon as they arise.
- Lack of follow through—don't let this stall.

Public Comment

This meeting was publicly-noticed through announcements in news media across the state, and the public was encouraged to attend. The meeting agenda contained an item for public comment at 3 p.m. Public comment was invited at 3 p.m. Four individuals offered comments. No written comments were submitted at the meeting. Comments are paraphrased below in the order they were received.

Chris Haugen (Great Yellowstone Coalition)

It is impressive to see the Commissioners, the Department, and the Non-governmental Organizations at the table together. Removing labels is a positive. The public trust doctrine is helpful and FWP needs to communicate that. GYC supported the wolf stamp and thanks to the advocates of that effort, this is now a success. This discussion needs to be integrated with the national one and include tribes. Thank you for your passion for wildlife in Montana.

Erin Edge (Defenders of Wildlife)

Thanks to the participants here today. Defenders were disappointed in the wolf stamp decision, but this discussion is encouraging. Finding common interests is positive.

Jim Manning (Treasurer, local sportsman's group, sportsman)

Encourage FWP in this effort. Disappointed in wolf stamp decision. Concerned about the future. Some of his organization's members are concerned about the influence of non-consumptive users. He is concerned about in-fighting between sportsmen's groups. FWP needs to make hard decisions for example—related to bison management. The agency needs adequate funding. Management issues are getting more complex.

Kurt Alt (Citizen)

We have a unique fish and wildlife resource here. Montana is a small state in terms of people knowing each other. We are unique in how we do conservation on Montana—at the grassroots level.

Advice to the Department on How to Proceed

The group observed that realistically there are short and long-term situations. In the short-term (4-6 months) the effort should be concentrated on building relationships and trust, working with the legislature, and supporting the recommendations of the LFAC. Issues may arise during the session that could drive wedges between certain interests and people should stay in touch and continue to work together.

In the long-term, participants expressed strong support to continue this discussion with some type of a group. The participants discussed various ways of organizing and leading a future discussion. The LFAC model was explained. In that case, FWP convened and provided staff support for the group chartered by the Director consistent with the work of the Environmental Quality Council. The LFAC had members who were legislators. FWP served as the broker (convener), but not the driver of the results. Three LFAC members present for this discussion stated that the Department staff maintained an appropriate relationship with the council and the model worked well for them. Most expressed preliminary support for a similar approach, but no decision was made on this except that FWP is the most logical lead.

The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation indicated a willingness to provide some financial support for the effort and several others (Trout Unlimited, Bear Creek Council, and others will research their ability to contribute. Contributions could be used to defray attendees' travel expenses to hold meetings around the state, and to hire a neutral facilitator.

Closing Remarks

Director Hagener provided closing remarks. There is a huge interest and passion in fish and wildlife issues in Montana--and the values involved. The Director thanked the participants for their ideas and attendance and hoped that the meeting had been helpful for the various interests to hear each other's perspectives. He committed to the following actions;

- 1) The Department will send information to the invitees about the work of the LFAC,
- 2) A meeting summary will be provided,
- 3) There is value to move this forward. He will convene some type of group in May 2015. He may query these members about specifics of forming that group in the interim.
- 4) The Department will maintain a connection with the national Blue Ribbon Panel.

Director Hagener believes that Montana can be a leader in the nation on the issue of a broader, more diverse constituency supporting the stewardship of our fish and wildlife resources.