

**FINDING COMMON GROUND:**  
**Discussion on Improving Fish and Wildlife for the Future**  
**Meeting Summary**  
**August 21, 2015**

**Meeting Objectives**

The objectives for the 8-21-15 meeting were as follows:

- 1) Participants understand and agree on the primary (overarching) objectives for the Finding Common Ground (FCG) process.
- 2) Participants agree on how the group will conduct its work and make recommendations, as stated in the draft FCG Organizing Document and/or as modified by the group.
- 3) The group has a general understanding of existing Department programs and budget.
- 4) Participants have shared their ideas for FWP's future priorities and direction.
- 5) Members of the public in attendance have had the chance to offer their thoughts.

**Introductions and Kick-off**

Everyone in the room introduced themselves. The facilitator went through the agenda and explained that the primary piece of work for the day was to get agreement on the purpose of these Finding Common Ground (FCG) discussions and how the group will operate. Following that, the Department presented information requested by the group at the June meeting to help inform the discussions.

Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) Director, Jeff Hagener, welcomed the meeting participants. He went on to explain that he wants to put the agency in the best circumstances for the future and include the public in these discussions. FWP is trying to involve the public and everyone with an interest. He shared that some people have expressed concerns about these discussions, uncertainty about the intended purpose, and questions about the motives of those involved. He believes the group needs continuity between sessions. He wants people to feel comfortable with these discussions and he encouraged concerned individuals/groups to provide input. He reflected on the work of the Licensing and Funding Advisory Council (LFAC) and the fact that that group of citizens saw a legitimate need and supported their recommendations all the way to the legislature. The Finding Common Ground group could follow a similar path. He encouraged the FCG participants to discuss what they want to accomplish from this effort and determine if there is agreement on the value of continuing these meetings.

Director Hagener shared that he recently participated on a panel with the Directors from the Idaho and Florida fish and wildlife departments to discuss the topic that this group is working on. Perceptions about other interests' agendas contributed to the failure of an effort in Idaho to start a conversation among Idahoans about how best to care for their wildlife in changing times. The effort in Florida was initiated by an outside group and was largely successful. That effort produced a successful citizen initiative that resulted in a real estate transfer tax with the revenue helping to pay for Florida's fish and wildlife work. He noted that the topic of broadening department funding has proven to be controversial elsewhere and that other states are interested and watching Montana's effort.

The Director went on to share that the national Blue Ribbon Panel is having discussions similar to the ones we are having but on a broader scale. That panel is made up of representatives from the outdoor recreation retail and manufacturing sector, the energy and automotive industries, private landowners, educational institutions, conservation organizations, sportsmen's groups and state fish and wildlife agencies. They are currently holding listening sessions and querying states. The Panel is looking at a

sustainable program similar to Pitman-Robertson (P-R) and Dingle-Johnson (D-J) that would generate money for a sportsman's trust fund. The Director explained that with P-R and D-J, the Department has to spend the money first, meet certain criteria, and match with state funds before they can be reimbursed. If a similar mechanism comes out of the Blue Ribbon Panel, Montana will have to find state matching dollars to access the funds, which speaks to the value of holding these FCG discussions.

Director Hagener expressed the importance of recognizing what we have today [fish and wildlife in Montana] and how we have come to this point (the North American model of wildlife management.) He suggested that Montanans should be proud of the fish and wildlife populations we have today, and emphasized the importance of continuing this. The Director also noted that there are more people enjoying wildlife than ever before, and that wildlife is of huge importance for tourism in Montana. Many groups and individuals might contribute to sustaining fish and wildlife; perhaps the challenge is how to accomplish this without alienating traditional constituents. With this background, the Director asked the group to use this meeting to consider how they want to proceed.

Following the Director's remarks, FCG members offered the following updates and comments:

- Wolves of the Rockies surveyed its members through Facebook. The survey (30-40 respondents) indicated support for non-consumptive programs, but 70-75% expressed concerns about trust and this would likely affect their financial contributions.
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation's (RMEF) interest is to help fund the Department better into the future. RMEF doesn't expect to agree 100% with FWP, but does not want to micro-manage the Department. RMEF members are sensitive to sportsmen's equity and cautious. What does all of this mean? The Department should decide how to operate; the purpose of the FCG group shouldn't be to resolve disagreements over department programs; there are other arenas for those discussions. The goal within this group should be respect.
- Bear Creek Council met and discussed this effort. They are hopeful. They are in favor of bumping up the price of conservation licenses, issuing stamps, increasing user fees or fishing access, or increasing the annual state park pass fee through DMV in order to increase funding to FWP. BCC members also support 90% of any additional revenue going toward the FWP general operating budget with 10% dedicated to "focused conservation efforts." Members feel that funding radio-collaring would be fine. However some suggested that in order to draw in preservation-minded wildlife-watcher dollars, it might be good to split off lethal removal funding from conservation stamps, access fees, etc. Bear Creek Council will support a fight to obtain general fund dollars for FWP. The Council would also support the sale of one or more stamps. BCC members who are hunters are concerned with loss of access. Hunters and anglers are finding that more and more lands are private and off limits and it causes unnatural movements of the animals on the landscape. Elk hide out on private lands during hunting season and then overpopulate surrounding farms after the season ends. Members also noted that access is important to those who participate in wildlife watching. BCC Members also would like to see wildlife management practices take into account social animals.
- Greater Yellowstone Coalition: Chris updated the FCG members on developments in Wyoming. According to Chris, Wyoming Game and Fish experienced approximately \$8 million in budget cuts. The Governor convened a task force. The task force was a diverse group looking for areas of agreement. They recommended a Department audit, bifurcating the budget (license dollars would fund management of game species), giving the Commission the ability to establish license fees, funding endangered species work out of the general fund, and not requesting general funds to cover employee benefits if the previous/above recommendations were accepted. The task force asked questions about what additional funds would be used for beyond the current budget, critical of funding the agency without future projected costs and programs. Chris was excited to hear the results of FWP's 15 and Forward initiative because it seems MT is being proactive around identifying future goals of the Department and budget needs.

## Finding Common Ground Group's Purpose

At its meeting in June, the group received a draft Overview that contained background material to put the discussion in context, a statement of potential objectives, and other suggested ideas for how the group would operate. The FCG discussed the Overview but did not reach agreement on the contents. In preparation for this meeting (August 21), the FWP staff and facilitator removed the background information from the Overview (where the group had gotten stuck at the June meeting) and provided a one-page handout titled "Organizing Document." The Organizing Document contained the draft objectives and suggestions on how the group would operate. Facilitator Beck wrote the objectives from the Organizing Document on a flip chart in the front of the room. The two draft objectives were:

- 1) Develop recommendations for how to strengthen relationships, trust, mutual respect, and understanding among the many different people in all the ways they enjoy fish and wildlife resources in Montana.
- 2) Develop recommendations for broadening the support and funding for fish and wildlife management and the steps needed to bring these recommendations to fruition.

Beck then handed out note cards to each FCG member and each member of the public in the audience. Everyone was asked to write down what they believed the objectives or purpose of the group is, or to indicate if they agreed with the objectives as proposed.

Cards were collected from the audience and read aloud by the facilitator. They were taped to the wall. This was done so that the FCG members at the table could understand the expectations of the public. The cards collected from the public members in the audience offered the following provided verbatim below:

- To develop and fund the organization (FWP) that is widely recognized and sought out as informing and implementing the public's interest in all wildlife—the workers with the expertise to translate diverse public values into resources and opportunities reflective.
- Agree with the objectives but would broaden fish and wildlife to include all work FWP does. This could be done as part of the group's work or in coordination with others.
- Agree with this statement. (Objective #1) Recommendations don't always become reality. Objective 2 should have more emphasis on developing and implementing a clear plan, with a set timeframe for seeing these objectives to completion.
- I agree with the objectives. The second objective is ultimately the key and should be the end focus. The first objective is a pathway (in my view) to the second objective. Clearly identifying the 2<sup>nd</sup> objective as the ultimate purpose/endpoint might be good.

The cards were also collected from the FCG members at the table and shuffled. Each member was given a card with objectives written by someone else at the table to read aloud. The following is the content of the cards read at the table.

- Develop working relationships and understanding among different interest groups regarding fish and wildlife. Improve trust of FWP among these interest groups recognizing these are public resources. Agree with Objective 2 as written.
- Develop sustainable methods/ways to generate long term funding mechanisms for MT FWP to operate. (I only have one primary purpose for participating in this group.).
- I agree with the objectives. It is important to build trust and respect and then look at specific recommendations on how to achieve those goals.
- These objectives are clear and exactly what we should be pursuing.
- No change. Agree with objectives as stated.

- Relative to Goal 1. Seek to understand other points of view. Clarify areas of overlap “Common ground” and identify where areas of non-agreement exist. Relative to Goal 2. a) In looking at the areas of overlap, determine funding sources to cover the common areas, b) Protect traditional funding and management activities/priorities (no net loss) while seeking to expand the Dept. role in non-game management. (not sure non-game management is the best term here)
- 1. To seriously include all interested parties. A) over all agree--follow through. 2. With funding from all sources should be serious input. A) over all agree
- Basically I agree with the two state objectives. However, I suggest some clarification on Objective 2. Rather than “broadening the support and funding for fish and wildlife management” aren’t we really talking about “broadening the support and funding for MT FWP?” It is important to recognize the millions of dollars of support for fish and wildlife that already comes through many NGO’s—much of it contributed by non-sportsmen. Those folks support fish and wildlife management, but not necessarily the state agency.
- 1. Enjoy and provide fish and wildlife resources.
- Build, strengthen and broaden the base of support of MDFWP’s management of the public fish and wildlife resources. Support includes financial, political, and social support. However, Barb’s statement is fine.
- Generally the goals are OK. The second objective (figuring out how to broaden funding for fish and wildlife is more the reason my organization is participating in the process. On the first statement it seems there is a progression to relationship building that is missing. First you strengthen relationships. That increases understanding, which can bring mutual respect. But, I’m not clear about strengthening trust...it doesn’t fit. Trying to get everyone to work together to support fish and wildlife conservation, respecting each other’s roles, seems like a simpler, more realistic first goal.
- First objective: strengthen (is not inclusive of what needs to be done) and create is not the right word but intent to make new relationships. Second objective suggested potential revision: for the Department’s ability to manage healthy populations of all native wildlife (more specific than fish and wildlife management.)

The group discussed all of this input on their *purpose*. The wording was agreed to after a break during which FWP consolidated comments into the following two statements.

**The Finding Common Ground to Sustain Fish and Wildlife group (FCG) has assembled for the purpose of developing recommendations for broadening funding sources for FWP fish and wildlife programs.**

**In recognition that public support will be needed to broaden funding for FWP, the FCG group will also develop recommendations for building and strengthening relationships, trust, and mutual respect and understanding among the many different people who enjoy and help to sustain fish and wildlife in Montana.**

### **30,000-foot View of FWP**

FWP’s Chief of Operations Paul Sihler showed a short video giving an overview of the fish, wildlife, and parks resources in the state and FWP’s services. He provided and discussed two handouts (Montana FWP Budget 101, and Revenue and Budget Overview.)

56% of the Department’s budget comes from hunting and fishing licenses (\$44.5 million), 21% of the funds are from federal P-R and D-J (\$17 million), 17% are earmarked from hunting and fishing licenses (\$13.4 million), 1% comes from the state’s general fund for Aquatic Invasive Species work (\$940,000), and 5% is other. The second handout broke out the spending and FTEs by program area.

Paul also explained that the business model for the last 50 years was a ten-year cycle where the general license account balance would build over the first years of the cycle, reach a point where expenditures equal revenue, and then expenditures would exceed revenue during the final years of the 10-year cycle. The last legislature changed the 10-year cycle to a 4-year review cycle (plus two years of lag time for rate increases to be implemented.)

The Department cut \$1.4 million from its budget in order to address revenue shortfalls. The 2015 legislature also mandated budget reductions to all state agencies; for FWP this equated to approximately \$1 million or 20 positions (FTEs). FWP is not fully matching P-R federal funds with state dollars and had to transfer money between accounts to get the full amount of P-R funds this year. P-R was growing but is now stable and could decline. D-J funds peaked in 2009. Staff is the Department's biggest expense. The Wildlife Division is the only division that fully supports itself financially by generating more hunting license dollars than it spends (hunting license sales are also used to support other areas within the department). Non-resident hunting licenses provide two-thirds of the Department's income. The legislature sets all hunting and fishing license fees—regardless of the cost to deliver the programs. FWP also depends on 3300 volunteers.

### **Public Comment**

Chad Bishop: Wildlife Biology Conservation Program, University of Montana  
Supports a well-funded Department. A number of states have gone through this situation. Hats off to Montana for managing almost exclusively with license dollars. Suggested that other sources of funding should be looked at.

David Allen: RMEF

It's remarkable what we have in Montana and what we are getting. We really don't have much to complain about.

### **Operating Rules (Review of the Organizing Document)**

The FCG group reviewed the rest of the one-page organizing document together. They had refined and agreed to the objectives (now titled the *purpose*) in the morning. The following agreed-to changes will be reflected in an updated version of the Organizing Document to be compiled and provided by FWP's Charlie Sperry following the meeting. Some highlights of the discussion included:

- Agreement about how decisions will be made. The group will strive for consensus. If consensus isn't reached at first, the group will step away from the decision either during the meeting or between meetings and then come back to the decision to try again for consensus. If consensus still can't be reached, the group may vote. Any decision of the group from a vote will be valid only if it has a super majority (defined as 75% of the members present.) Discussion points including the reasons for disagreement will be documented in the meeting summary.
- Public comment is extremely important. The group would like to have several public comment periods on each agenda—perhaps before or after each major topic, but in any case, not fewer than three times each meeting day. The public needs multiple ways to learn about meetings including FWP's website, news releases, and the distribution list.
- The group discussed adding members in order to have broader representation of various interests. The group noted that there are already 23 people in the group, and that adding more people now could make it more difficult in terms of continuity and relationship building. They noted that a more concerted effort to provide public involvement during these meetings could help to ensure that various interests are represented. The group decided not to add any members.

- References to FWP's preference or recommendations in the draft organizing document will be struck from the final document. The document belongs to the group, not FWP.
- There was extensive discussion about the use of alternates (individuals who would attend a meeting on behalf of an absent group member). The group decided to allow alternates with certain conditions. Only one other person per group member would be allowed to serve as an alternate during this process and they must be designated by the member. The person serving as an alternate should attend as many meetings as possible and also be at the meeting prior to the meeting when they will serve as an alternate for an absent group member.
- Requests for presentations by group members and others will be e-mailed out to the whole group. Anyone requesting time on the agenda to make a presentation will be asked to provide information about the purpose of the presentation and what they will cover. This will be included in the e-mail so that group members have a basis for deciding which presentations to hear.
- The one-year timeline in the Organizing Document started with the June meeting, not the meeting last fall. The group has up to five more meetings to accomplish their work. The group feels a sense of urgency for the work.

## 15 and Forward

FWP's Charlie Sperry updated the group on the '15 and Forward initiative. He acknowledged FWP's Vivaca Crowser for her contributions to '15 and Forward.

There has been a lot of change and the Department is looking ahead. Greater than 50% of the Department's employees have been with FWP for less than 10 years and there are lots of changes on the landscape. Now is an important time to set things up for the next 10-20 years. FWP is checking in with the public and also with employees through this effort to see where they want the agency to go. There is lots of opportunity for public involvement. FWP just finished public listening sessions in all of the regions and with employees in each region. An internal group of employees is pulling the information together now. This is a report card for FWP. How are we doing today? What do you want to see in the future?

What is the relationship between '15 and Forward and Finding Common Ground? '15 and Forward is a large initiative, involving the whole Department over a long period. The FCG group is a subset, a smaller effort to look at a focused part of the Department's future. The products of '15 and Forward relate to the Department's Vision Document. That effort is not looking specifically at funding. The FCG group believes it would be helpful to their own discussions to understand the '15 and Forward results as they pertain to sustainable funding for FWP. FCG observed that it was very positive that Department staff is involved in '15 and Forward.

The group brainstormed a list in response to the question, What does FWP do now?

- ❖ Statutory responsibilities (state)
  - Manage fish and wildlife for the benefit of the people of Montana
  - Enforce laws
  - Keep species of the endangered species list
- ❖ Statutory responsibilities (federal)
  - Manage endangered species
  - Manage migratory waterfowl
  - Comply with P-R and D-J requirements
- ❖ Manage big game, fish, furbearers, non-game species (native and non-native)
- ❖ Conflict management
- ❖ Education (hunter education, angler education, conservation education, schools, etc.)

- ❖ Provide opportunities (access, fishing, hunting, wildlife watching, and recreation)
- ❖ Research, monitoring and data collection
- ❖ Landowner and resident relations
- ❖ Land management, habitat management
- ❖ Cooperation with federal land managers on land management planning
- ❖ Seek public input
- ❖ Responsive management, social science
- ❖ Procure land and habitat
- ❖ Advocate for fish and wildlife with legislature

The group then brainstormed in response to the question, What should FWP do in the next 10 years?

- ❖ All of the things FWP is currently doing (listed above)
- ❖ Support wildlife watching opportunities and develop funding to do this
- ❖ Manage existing and potential disease
- ❖ Invest in tools for conflict management (e.g. non-lethal predator control)
- ❖ Engage people who aren't currently engaged
- ❖ Determine ways to manage fish, wildlife, and habitat during climate change
- ❖ Provide greater hunting and fishing opportunities
- ❖ Address over-population issues especially on private land
- ❖ Address fish and wildlife populations that are in trouble
- ❖ Maintain and expand relevance of fish and wildlife to people
- ❖ Increase landowner relations, recognize change in land use, for example non-resident landowners
- ❖ More research by FWP
- ❖ More collaborative work with other research efforts (private, federal, etc.)
- ❖ Increase staff capacity
- ❖ Find sustainable funding for doing these things
- ❖ Increase collaboration with NGOs, etc.
- ❖ Address enforcement issues of recruitment and retention (warden's pay)
- ❖ Help public understand the programs and funding situation
- ❖ No net loss in hunting and fishing opportunities.

Brief discussion following the development of these two lists added to the sense of urgency for the group's work. FCG members observed that the demands in the future are huge, and that the Department is already facing a tight financial situation just to continue providing existing services.

### **How Do People Value Fish and Wildlife in the Western U.S. Including Montana?**

Charlie Sperry presented information that was put together by Mike Lewis, Social Scientist in the FWP Responsive Management Unit. The information came from a 2004 study by the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) and Colorado State University. The study looked at values and identified factors that affect values to gain a better understanding of values related to fish and wildlife.

A value is a strongly-held principle. Values are few in number, resistant to change, and difficult to measure. Charlie explained the four value orientations that emerged from the work.

1. Utilitarian (47% of Montanans)
2. Mutualist (19% of Montanans)
3. Pluralist (27% of Montanans)
4. Distanced (7% of Montanans)

The study suggests a shift towards mutualistic values in the west. The group discussed implications of the results of this work for the future of FWP. Younger Montanans are more mutualistic and pluralistic

than the present population. The percent of distanced individuals is quite low in Montana even compared to the other western states. The 47% of Montanans with utilitarian values is how FWP has been funded for the past many years. Montana Wild is conducting a somewhat similar study now. Results should be available in November. Ensuring that participation in hunting and fishing in Montana stays strong may require different messaging in the future. AFWA will repeat the wildlife values study in 2016—a ten-year interval from the initial study.

### **Public Comment**

Dan Bailey (Pheasants Forever): Thanks to the committee members for their service. Important that there is an implementation piece to FCG. Important to take this group's recommendations to the next step and see them through. FWP needs to come up with match to take full advantage of P-R and D-J federal funds. NGOs can help get information out. If FWP must make cuts, be creative, consider transferring positions to NGO's. Lots of people want a piece of Montana. Fee title acquisitions are an important tool. Conservation easements are good, but not enough. Getting information out is very important.

Marshall Johnson (Mule Deer Foundation): Lots of good NGO's in Montana. NGO's have funds available. Get information out about what FWP is doing. Some people are attending all FWP '15 and Forward meetings. NGO's need to do our part with sharing the information. Hope FWP can engage with NGO's by attending banquets, for example.

### **Meeting Evaluation**

The group was asked what worked for you about today or what needs to be changed?

- The purpose and process discussion was productive and necessary. Given the diversity of the group, this was as fast as we could go.
- Feel comfortable that we are back on track—more so than after the last meeting.
- The situation is urgent—even to sustain what we have now.
- We need to get a better handle on the funding that is needed.
- Director Hagener thanked the participants for confirming through their discussions today that they wish to continue this work together.

### **Next Meeting**

Topics identified for the next meeting included:

- The role of fish and wildlife in Montana's tourism economy (invite Dr. Nickerson to speak)
- Economic impact of citizen science
- What other states have tried to create sustainable funding and the results (may want to have WMI or AFWA present on this)
- Projected dollar needs to sustain existing programs (and information about the amounts that have been transferred to cover state match for P-R and D-J)
- Don't want to spend the whole meeting hearing presentations, want problem solving time
- As part of the problem solving: figure out what we need to do to convince others to support FWP
- Montanan's attitudes on conservation funding (check with Mark Aagenes)

The next Finding Common Ground Meeting will be held in Bozeman on Tuesday, October 20 (9 a.m.) at the Greater Yellowstone Coalition office. The meeting following the October 20 meeting will be in Helena on Friday, December 11 (9a.m.) at FWP's Montana WILD.

8-21-15 Public sign-in sheet: Greg Munther; Dan Bailey; Marshall Johnson; Chad Bishop; Penny Maldonado