

Joint Region 6 Citizens Advisory Council / Legislative Update Presentation
December 15th, 2014
Great Northern Inn, Havre
10:00 am-4:00 pm

Region 6 CAC members present: Steve Harada, Damien Austin, Henry Gordon, Jim Carver, Jason Holt, Terry Stoppa, Mark Peterson.

Region 6 CAC members not present: Mark Azure, Carla Hunsley, Eugene Lavey, Deb Madison, Steve Schindler, Bob Waldron.

FWP members present: Cody Nagel, Scott Hemmer, Mark Sullivan, Kelly Compton, Marc Kloker, Mike Herman, Shane Reno, Tom Flowers, Steve Dalbey.

Guest Speaker: Paul Sihler-Directors office, FWP Chief of Field Operations

Guests attending the meeting:

Richard Stuker, MT F&W Commissioner
Mike Lang, Representative, House District 33
Kristen Hansen, Senator, Senate District 14
Stephanie Hess, Representative, House District 28
Bruce Meyers, Representative, House District 32
Samantha Rybicki, Havre trails organization
Lindsey Bennett, Havre trails organization

10:00am Opening comments

Region 6 Supervisor Tom Flowers opened the meeting with a welcome and a general discussion of the agenda. Next, he asked the CAC members, FWP employees, and guests to introduce themselves.

10:30am CAC Members Roundtable:

Steve Harada: Steve opened by admitting that the license increase was probably inevitable, and he is supportive of increase. But, he would like to see family more influenced in the licenses packages, like a husband/wife license, or more special prices/packages with young folks. Also, he was concerned about the change in the senior citizen discount. Steve also had a concern about the elk tagging incident in the Clyde Park area, and that it needs to be talked about.

Mike Herman responded: Mike said that the warden saw the hunter pull out the tag and put it back in his pocket, and then attempted to put it on when the officer was approaching. The hunter made a conscious decision to NOT tag the animal.

Damien Austin: Stated that the change in APR Block Management, with the new “phone line” sign-in system, went well. Hunter numbers were down, probably due to the lack of game. He supports the fee increase, and thinks that it’s a good deal for proper FWP management.

Henry Gordon: Henry says he approves the fee increase. He said that the antelope numbers are still down in his area. Personally, he thought the whitetail and mule deer doe (no mule deer doe with A tag) should have been switched around. He has had youth out on special hunts, but not as many as he had hoped. Antelope numbers seem to be increasing as winter is setting in, as they are migrating into the area. Deer and pheasant hunting and numbers have been pretty good.

Jim Carver: First, Jim described his experience with an out of state license purchase in Washington. It was \$29 for a 2-day license, and the process seems like a much easier thing in Washington; less questions, information, etc. Next, he had a question of the shooting wolves in southern Phillips County...has it been reported, how does the reporting work, do we have any confirmed kills? Mike Herman (FWP) responded with no, there has not been any reported kills. Jim had a question on the Clyde Park elk tagging issue, if the rule should continue to be the “tagging immediately after kill”. Mike Herman(FWP) responded yes, that the rule should remain the same and is very clear. Next, he had a question about the incident with Warden Dirk Paulson detained with the tribe earlier this year. Mike Herman and Tom Flowers (FWP) responded to clear up the perceptions of the incident and responded to a variety of related questions.

Lastly, Jim wanted to bring up that Warden Ben Morin was a hard working “son of a gun” and that he was seen all over the place. Has has heard good things, and no complaints, about him. Mike Lang (legislator) said that he had been checked by him while fishing, and he was a real nice, polite young man.

Jason Holt: Jason had a question on the brucellosis with bison effort. Mike Herman/Tom Flowers (FWP) response: One large bull did not get tested in region 6 that is on Ft Peck Reservatoin, and one did not get tested that was born afterward. Two bison were lost, one trampled by a bull, and one that was an old cow that seized up in the chute. Jason also wondered if there were any that tested positive this past year. He also asked about the intermingling with the different herds and the different designated “names” of the herds, whether wild, livestock, etc and if they are allowed to intermingle. Mike Herman (FWP) said no, the herds are separated; Yellowstone bison stay together, and do not intermingle with other bison on tribal land. Jason had a question if there was a necropsy on one that died in the chute. Mike Herman and Tom Flowers (FWP) responded that no necropsy was performed on the one in chute, but blood samples were taken. There was a necropsy on the calf that was trampled, and it had a huge hole in it. Jason said with a whole week of nice warm temperatures the soils are thawing out, and things are melting. Things are looking good for the winter.

Terry Stoppa: Terry mentioned that when talking with some of his senior citizen friends, they are upset about the possibilities of the new license fee proposal taking away free fishing and hunting licenses after they have been getting them for all of these years. He was also wondering about the doe whitetail/mule deer management. He has seen a lot of mule deer but only two whitetail does while hunting this year. Mark Sullivan (FWP) responded with several points: 1.

the doe restriction wasn't set by biologist, but by commissioners, based on public comments heard last fall. 2. whitetails are primarily on private land, and private land owners can manage the amount of hunting pressure on their land. Richard Stuker- (Commissioner) said that they were beat up pretty bad at their decision, but felt that it was the right decision. Mark Sullivan(FWP) - Said that EHD outbreaks have been an issue. Henry Gordon (CAC)- said numbers were down on WT, but there were still some taken. Maybe 30 does at max, when there used to be around 100. Terry also asked about whether a friend needs to buy a park sticker to fish in Beaver Creek County Park. Mark Peterson (CAC) responded, yes.

More discussion from several members about the proposed changing of licenses fees for native out of state, senior citizens, etc. and would like some more answers.

Mark Peterson- Mark thinks that the whitetail population on his place is about 10% of average. Mule deer are somewhat stable. Antelope numbers seem to be coming back. He thinks it's the best sharptail numbers he has ever seen...he even saw them dancing (lek) in November. Huns and Pheasants are coming back. Mark feels the Swift fox numbers have been down, and he doesn't see them as much anymore. He wants to commend the law enforcement side of FWP, and said that they are doing a great job. He has heard little on the Milk River Ranch (Lost River Wildlife Management Area)...and has said if anything (the large money that was spent on it) provides precedence for future purchases. He is looking to do a land exchange with Walleye's Unlimited and the Bureau of Reclamation for 40 acres in Kings Bay (on Fresno) for a campground. He has also looked into the fact that Fresno is an irrigation and flood control lake, not a recreational lake. However, the lake does have recreational water rights.

Other invited guests at the meeting:

Richard Stuker, Commissioner – Richard wanted to respond to the Clyde Park incident. He says that this is unfortunate and unfair event due to MT FWP not having clout with the courts. He feels that wardens do their job and then good cases get dismissed. However, the wardens get blamed for inaction or not strict enough penalties, when it is the court that decides the punishment. He feels that there needs to be better rapport with FWP and courts.

Lindsay Bennett - for Havre Trails- Havre trails is a newly formed committee that wants to improve and expand on putting in and making better trails in Havre and Hill county. Havre trails has a Facebook site.

Samantha Rybicki--for Havre Trails- She said they attended the meeting to meet and greet folks and to find out in what capacity that FWP can help out with for the Havre Trails program.

12:00 MT FWP Region 6 update

Steve Dalbey- Fisheries Manager

Steve presented an “Angler Pressure Estimates” Power Point:

First slide: looked at how many licensed anglers have changed over the years (resident and non resident). Steve said that angler pressure is determined by a survey. The purpose of the survey is to see how folks fish, what they fish, etc., and many times has other questions for gathering data on a variety of subjects. The data showed that Region six, as expected, has mostly boating and ice angling pressure. Steve briefly discussed factors that could affect angling pressure, such as the water cycle, Aquatic Invasive Species, fee increases, budget cuts (hatchery, field operations, access). Coming up is the fishing regulations change cycle- 2015 kicks off scoping process for 2016-2020 cycle.

Steve went over some Region 6 issues:

- Legislature proposed change in transport of life fish
- Pallid sturgeon Recovery (sue the USFWS/ACOE/USBOR), river modeling effort
- Culbertson Pond
- Red water River Fish Passage Enhancement-McCone County
- Nelson Drawdown in 2015 repair to dam
- Continued walleye stocking evaluation (Fresno and FP)
- Chinook salmon program (Ft. Peck Reservoir)
- Budget/Fee Increase???
- Retirements-Woody Baxter

Mike Herman- Warden Captain

There are 12 vacancies in the LE division, and they have to wait for the legislation session to see if we can fill them. Possibly up to 10 slots could be removed if the proposed new license fee does not pass. Mike was pleased to announce that Andy Matakis is new on board in the Havre area enforcement. Mike discussed his work with the Aquatic Invasive Species program, and how FWP is working with the Army Corp of Engineers in developing cleaning sites at access points.

(The following are a series of side discussions after Mike Herman was done with his report)

Mike Lang (legislator) asked a question about the Bull Whacker public access situation. Scott Hemmer answered for FWP: Scott described how the BLM has developed a scoping for possible roads into public land area. 5 roads were proposed, and 3 were eliminated. There needs to be an EIS for any road, and there will be AT LEAST a couple of years before any roads may be started. Another option was a land trade, and there were mixed feelings from the public about that.

Mark Peterson (CAC) expressed a concern about an elk brucellosis survey that was sent out, and commented that it was difficult to read and understand the questions.

Jason Holt (CAC) commented on a survey in 2010 about free roaming bison. He wants more surveys to see if there is interest in wild bison to hunt, and where. He wants the public to be able to make their case and wonders where and what people WANT bison. Jason wants region Region 6 to represent the public to say that we don't want bison. Tom Flowers- (FWP), and Commissioner Stuker responded by saying that there HAS been no wild bison put out on public lands, so Jason (and the public) has been listened to. Mike Lang (legislator)- commented about the discussion, and has said in meetings that there is no county in this state that would like to have bison.

Mark Sullivan- Wildlife manager

Mark readdressed the earlier question/comment from Terry Stoppa (CAC) about whitetail numbers. Mark then addressed Jim Carver's (CAC) concern from the last meeting about weeds (kochia) on Cree crossing. Mark had inspected with the Malta biologist, who then looked at mowing it, and talked to the adjacent land owner about cutting it. The landowner didn't want to...and didn't think it was a problem. Mike Lang (legislator) suggested the idea about being "neighborly", and that FWP should manage the land better if possible.

Mark noted that deer numbers in the region were low, but recovering. There has been good fawn numbers for antelope and mule deer. Elk numbers are doing great. There are good habitat conditions going into the winter, and the reduced hunting pressure and good conditions should combine for a good winter survival rate for deer. Mark gave several statistics on hunter numbers from Block Management (BM) in the area.

Terry Stoppa commented on the lack of BM in north Hill county. FWP respondents said it is a combination of funding, poor wildlife habitat (farmland) and limited availability of techs.

Scott Hemmer –Havre area Biologist

Scott went over a Power Point on the results of the game check station outside of Havre. Generally, hunter and game numbers were down. Upland bird showed good harvest.

Mark Peterson (CAC)- had a question about the drop off in WT after winters (what FWP sees in aerial surveys). Mark Sullivan (FWP) responded on the variability of the times, movements, etc. Mark Peterson (CAC) also wondered about turkeys, and what are the thoughts of turkeys in the west end of Region 6. Mark Sullivan (FWP) said turkeys are an important species and populations are always looking to be established if possible.

Mark Sullivan (FWP) said the potential deer seasons dates for 2015 will be out for public comment on the seasons shortly. Comments will need to be in by Jan. 15th. They are looking at either sex for WT and MD...but still no B tags for Region 6. Mule deer are still 10% below long term average across the region as a whole, but should be close to long term average next fall.

Jim Carver (CAC) had a question about handling urban deer problem...such as in Malta and elsewhere. Mark Sullivan (FWP) says that the towns have to approach FWP. Commissioner Stuker discussed the Roundup urban deer problem situation.

2:00 Paul Sihler- FWP Chief of Field Operation

Paul opened up by showing a video, highlighting what MT FWP does with license funding. Funding for FWP programs is not adequate, so we must increase revenue, decrease expenses, or redirect funding. There is about a \$5.7 mill yearly shortfall.

Annually, the Department is funded through \$71 mill in hunting and fishing licenses and PR act.

2/3 license fees, 1/3 fed excise tax

2/3 is of license fees are from NR hunters

This deficit has been known, and was planned for at the time for 10 years from then (now).

There has been various funding cuts already

-special license upfront fee, reduce paper, smaller trucks, one position eliminated.

A brochure was handed out about the 2015 Montana Resident License Fee Proposal.

LFAC Recommendations:

-\$8 to hunting and \$3 to fishing

62-67 years for senior discount

All discounted license at 50% of full price

A 4-year rather than 10-year funding cycle

Potential cuts: *Looked in the brochure for other info./eliminating earmarks

Steve Harada (CAC) asked question of where does \$8 come from.

Paul Sieler (FWP) said that a base amount of \$8 would be issued when a hunting license was purchased, then one could buy tags after that for each individual species.

Mike Lang (legislator) asked to clarify about the \$8 if it's only once, or each license you buy.

There were then many other questions and comments about amounts that are increased in each particular way, and how much that will affect and add to the deficit, and also several questions/comments about how PR is a player in all of this.

Kristen Hansen, Senator posed a question on game retrieval of handicap hunters. Mike Herman (FWP) responded that the rule is not any different than for anyone else.

Legislative Discussion

A handout was distributed as a summary of the legislative bill drafts proposed by MT FWP for the 2015 Legislative Session.

*Paul Sihler (FWP) went through the handout

Topics included:

1. Electronic Signature (LC 379)
2. Dock on Wild Horse Island (LC 380)
3. Automatic Loss of Hunting and Trapping Privileges (LC 381)
4. Prohibit Statewide Transport of Live Fish (LC 382)
5. Creating an Enterprise Fund for Educational Purposes (LC 384)
6. Specify exception for state park contracts under procurement laws (LC 596)
7. FWP License Fee increase (LC 385)
8. “Coming home to hunt” and “native Montanan” nonresident hunting licenses

Jim Carver (CAC)- is for the license increase...but wants to leave the “coming home to hunt” and “native Montanan” the way it is.

3:15pm Comment Period

Tom opened things up for comment period:

Jason Holt (CAC)- commented about how he would like the county commissioners to make the decision on bison in their county, and the Governor. Jason wants bison with the same legal status, whether wild or livestock bison. He is concerned that if bison come off their lands and the court says they are wild that they can be considered a free roaming wild herd. Jason thinks bison could be put on the Endangered Species List if they become wild. He also has issues concerning if federal land is lost due to bison being on federal lands, he could not operate his ranch with the lost acreage. Jason commented about how private ranching, along with BLM leasing, is the reason that the prairies are the way they are (intact). He worries about losing that.

End of meeting, no date or location was set for the next meeting

