

Finding Common Ground to Sustain Fish and Wildlife

Meeting Summary for December 11, 2015

Montana Wild, Helena

Meeting Objectives

The objectives for the 12-11-15 meeting are as follows:

- 1) Share thoughts on lessons from Investing in Wildlife that apply to Montana.
- 2) Revisit and add to initial list of potential funding mechanisms.
- 3) Finalize critical screening questions.
- 4) Evaluate funding mechanisms against critical screening questions listed at October meeting.
- 5) Offer members of the public multiple opportunities to provide their input.

Welcome and Introductions

Participants introduced themselves. The facilitator ran through the agenda for the day, stressing how important it would be to retain focus with only one additional meeting planned for the group.

Director Hagener reported that although the general big game season has ended, the Department remains busy. Sustainable funding for state wildlife agencies remains a concern nationally. Dingle-Johnson (D-J) was recently reauthorized as part of the transportation bill. So funding from that source of federal excise taxes to the Department is assured for the next five years. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and Pitman-Robertson (P-R) funding is still in limbo. The P-R matching funds are significant for the Department. The national Blue Ribbon Panel is meeting this week. They are still looking at a national funding source, but whatever they propose would almost certainly require a local (state) match.

Paul Sihler spoke briefly about the products from this FCG. He sees the screening criteria or screening questions that the group has identified as the valuable tool for the Department's future use coming out of these conversations. At the next and final meeting, the group can discuss their second charge—building trust and strengthening relationships. This discussion about trust and relationships will be in the context of successfully moving a funding initiative or package of initiatives forward in the future.

2015 and Forward Update

Charlie Sperry stated that he believes the work from the department's '15 and Forward initiative could make the case for demonstrating value to the broader public from fish and wildlife management. This is consistent with one of the lessons from the Missouri Department of Conservation—when asking for support, you need to be able to demonstrate the benefits.

2015 and Forward will provide broad guidance for the next ten years. The document will contain core values, e.g., that fish and wildlife are public resources, not to be privatized. These will guide programs in the future. The draft document will be provided to Director Hagener and the State Management Team in January and be finalized by the spring of 2016. The 2015 and Forward group has discussed the

Department's traditional support (license buyers) and then looked at what the future may bring. The vision document is expected to be consistent with the FCG effort.

FCG Participants' Top Three Expected Benefits

FCG members had tasked themselves with identifying the benefits that could be derived from sustainable funding from a broader range of sources. A number of group members provided their ideas to Charlie prior to the meeting. Charlie compiled those he received, summarized them and handed out his summary along with the original language submitted. The group quickly read through these items and observed that many of them related to FWP expanding its efforts to communicate the benefits of services that are currently provided by the Department. How do you get people interested, excited, and better engaged? A better informed and interested public can serve as the basis for working successfully with their legislators.

The group discussed existing national education programs such as Project Wild, Project Wet, and Growing up Wild. There is no need to reinvent the wheel on these programs. It would be good to strengthen them. Delivering the programs in the school is somewhat difficult because schools are challenged to implement core standards and as a result, teachers have less flexibility. Hunter Education is another large and effective piece of education and outreach. Missouri's Design for Conservation greatly expanded learning opportunities and judging by their success in getting funding, this was well received by the public.

Ilona Popper mentioned a study she had become aware of that she believes suggests non-conservation users may be a larger source of funding than some of the traditional funding state wildlife agencies have utilized.

Lessons Learned from Investing in Wildlife that Could Apply to Montana

Participants shared what they took away from reading the Investing in Wildlife report that could be relevant in Montana.

- It took a long time to get the additional funding mechanism in place.
- There was an explicit connection between funding and expenditures.
- There was support from business.
- There is value in states having mechanisms to match other dollars (existing and new sources)
- There is a need for public involvement and public support. The Design for Conservation was easy to understand, credible, and transparent. Make the contract between FWP and the public clear.
- Draw in a broad constituency.
- Use champions.
- Conservation organizations put dollars in to help fund the campaign.
- Stay with it. Follow-up and present what you do.
- There is not much duplication between the approaches taken by various states. Montana needs an approach that will work here given our set of circumstances.
- It doesn't take much opposition to cause failure.

- The Governor's role should be a champion.
- Missouri succeeded by taxing without people being aware of it because it was broad based and did not target a narrow group or interest.
- Need to articulate the programs and the results. Montana needs to get to this point.
- The public perception of the agency points to the need for more education to get support. FWP should do public opinion research and address issues.
- Montana has a demonstrated need—should look down the road.
- A broad array of champions will be needed (legislators and outside champions.)
- Make the case, educate the public and the funding mechanism will follow.
- Make it tangible.
- Public support outweighs opposition.
- The roadmap needs to be tweaked for Montana (for example we have a great deal of public land compared to states like Missouri.)
- We need momentum and support of Montanans. There is urgency. FWP should work with the Bullock administration and not wait for the next one.
- Build the case for support—relatively easy to show the need
- Sales tax approach doesn't fit for Montana. We need a good case about providing services that benefit Montanans.
- Start with a broad coalition to learn the pitfalls early on.
- Be as detailed and explicit as possible. People want to know how the funds will be spent.
- The general fund is the most likely source of future dollars.
- A campaign strategy has a huge effect on the probability for success. Takes time, dedication and an open mind.
- Need to communicate with Montanans now about what FWP does—broad based benefits.
- Messages need to be clear. Materials need to be well-written to improve public perception and build support.
- Consider those making indirect contributions, for example recognize agriculture's role.
- FWP has overwhelming public support.
- Need to identify value. Finding a mechanism without identifying benefits won't be successful.
- In other states, other parties were included and lead to success. For example, agriculture faces threats too. Agriculture and wildlife agencies came together in face of land development.

List of Potential Funding Mechanisms

The group revisited the list of potential funding mechanisms from the June and September meetings. Several potential funding mechanisms were added for consideration; rental car tax, vehicle registration fee, lodging tax, Governor's emergency fund (and environmental contingency account), general fund, and a voluntary rounding-up by the purchaser on the price of an item for sale.

Public Comment

Jessie Walthers (Montana Outdoor Legacy Foundation)

People would rather donate to a non-profit than donate money to government. Some donors have very specific interests. The Foundation could tailor funds to specific areas or interests.

Penny Moldenadeau (Cougar Fund)

Everyone supports FWP having sustainable funding. Need to reach the 80% of people in the middle and convince them they are consumers of FWP's services.

Barbara Ulrich O'Grady (Bearcreek Council)

It is gratifying to see the group working together.

Quentin Kujala (FWP)

This is a conversation with enormous potential. There is a gap between vision and implementation. The effort is vulnerable and people need to stay away from going to reptilian responses (knee-jerk reactions.) We are responsible for launching the effort with the biggest push possible. We all have individual values and we can and should embrace the imperfections of others - our neighbors - and move ahead together.

Report on the National Blue Ribbon Panel

Lauri Hanauska-Brown gave an update on the work of the panel. She attended their meeting earlier in the week. The Blue Ribbon Panel is organized under the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. The Association is a non-profit umbrella for state fish and wildlife agencies. The Panel consists of 29 professionals including industry, and fish and wildlife interests. The Panel has met three times in the past year including this recent meeting to identify potential alternative funding sources for fish and wildlife at the national scale. There is a need to keep species off the endangered species lists and retain them under state, rather than federal control. There is also a need to increase the security of state management agencies and their role in conserving wildlife and connecting people to it.

The Panel considered several options; additional/new excise taxes on outdoor equipment, corporate partnerships with voluntary contributions, and oil and gas revenues before they are deposited in the federal treasury. This final option is the one that will be recommended and it has the support of the oil and gas industry. There will be a public rollout of the strategy in the spring. This option would have no effect on P-R or D-J funds. Similar to those funds, this new option would require state match or either 25% or 35%. The state match could come from any other non-federal source such as license dollars if there were license dollars available. Each state developed a Wildlife Action Plan. The average need for each state identified in these plans was \$28.5 million/year. The total need across all of the states was \$1.3 billion.

Screening/Guidelines Questions

The group reviewed the questions they had developed earlier to edit them before applying them to the potential funding mechanisms. The questions are intended to inform decisions, but not finally determine the feasibility of pursuing a particular funding mechanism. The questions as edited by the group are as follows:

- 1) Does it have state-wide support?
- 2) Does it attract a broad range of interests?
- 3) Would it have organized opposition?
- 4) Are the administrative costs burdensome?
- 5) Does it supply a consistent revenue stream?
- 6) Do the individuals who benefit contribute?

- 7) Is it marketable?
- 8) Does it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?
- 9) Is it feasible to enact the mechanism?
- 10) Is it sustainable long-term?
- 11) Does it provide additional funding over the current funding?

Potential Funding Mechanisms

The group then looked at the list of funding mechanisms from past meetings—adding those identified earlier this day. They did a thumbs up, sideways, or thumbs down vote for each of the ideas as a means of establishing a general priority list to start into evaluating the funding mechanism with the screening/guidelines questions. The following mechanisms ranked most highly by the vote (top 6) were then put through the screening questions¹. The remainder fell off the list for now due to time constraints and will likely not be revisited by this group as a whole. The list below starts with the funding mechanisms that received the most thumbs up votes and works down.

Note: For clarity and consistency, we altered the evaluation questions by starting each question with “Would it...”, rather than “Does it...”. Also, the group didn’t evaluate of the idea to “establish a recreation license for non-consumptive users similar to the conservation license that is required of hunters and anglers”. The group decided more discussion is needed to understand this idea.

1. Establish a natural resource trust fund where general funds are used for natural resource projects.

1) <i>Would it have state-wide support?</i>	Unknown
2) <i>Would it attract a broad range of interests?</i>	Yes
3) <i>Would it have organized opposition?</i>	Yes
4) <i>Would the administrative costs be burdensome?</i>	Minimal
5) <i>Would it supply a consistent revenue stream?</i>	Yes
6) <i>Would the individuals who benefit contribute?</i>	Yes
7) <i>Would it be marketable?</i>	Yes
8) <i>Would it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?</i>	Both
9) <i>Would it be feasible to enact the mechanism?</i>	Yes
10) <i>Would it be sustainable long-term?</i>	Probably
11) <i>Would it provide additional funding over the current funding?</i>	Yes

¹ The group also evaluated the idea of using tax revenue for fish and wildlife management but acknowledged that it would be necessary to break this into more specific proposals (mechanisms) in order to assess their merits.

2. Severance tax on resource extraction dedicated to wildlife.

1) <i>Would it have state-wide support?</i>	Unsure
2) <i>Would it attract a broad range of interests?</i>	Yes
3) <i>Would it have organized opposition?</i>	Yes
4) <i>Would the administrative costs be burdensome?</i>	No
5) <i>Would it supply a consistent revenue stream?</i>	Unsure
6) <i>Would the individuals who benefit contribute?</i>	Yes
7) <i>Would it be marketable?</i>	Yes
8) <i>Would it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?</i>	Targeted
9) <i>Would it be feasible to enact the mechanism?</i>	Yes
10) <i>Would it be sustainable long-term?</i>	Maybe
11) <i>Would it provide additional funding over the current funding?</i>	Yes

3. Governor's emergency funds (and environmental contingency fund)

1) <i>Would it have state-wide support?</i>	Yes
2) <i>Would it attract a broad range of interests?</i>	No
3) <i>Would it have organized opposition?</i>	No
4) <i>Would the administrative costs be burdensome?</i>	No
5) <i>Would it supply a consistent revenue stream?</i>	No
6) <i>Would the individuals who benefit contribute?</i>	Yes
7) <i>Would it be marketable?</i>	Maybe
8) <i>Would it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?</i>	Targeted
9) <i>Would it be feasible to enact the mechanism?</i>	Maybe
10) <i>Would it be sustainable long-term?</i>	No
11) <i>Would it provide additional funding over the current funding?</i>	Yes

4. Establish a recreation license for non-consumptive users similar to the conservation license that is required of hunters and anglers.

1) <i>Would it have state-wide support?</i>	To be continued
2) <i>Would it attract a broad range of interests?</i>	To be continued
3) <i>Would it have organized opposition?</i>	To be continued
4) <i>Would the administrative costs be burdensome?</i>	To be continued
5) <i>Would it supply a consistent revenue stream?</i>	To be continued
6) <i>Would the individuals who benefit contribute?</i>	To be continued
7) <i>Would it be marketable?</i>	To be continued
8) <i>Would it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?</i>	To be continued
9) <i>Would it be feasible to enact the mechanism?</i>	To be continued
10) <i>Would it be sustainable long-term?</i>	To be continued
11) <i>Would it provide additional funding over the current funding?</i>	To be continued

5. Boat launch / FAS user fee.

1) <i>Would it have state-wide support?</i>	No
2) <i>Would it attract a broad range of interests?</i>	No
3) <i>Would it have organized opposition?</i>	Yes
4) <i>Would the administrative costs be burdensome?</i>	Maybe
5) <i>Would it supply a consistent revenue stream?</i>	Yes
6) <i>Would the individuals who benefit contribute?</i>	Yes
7) <i>Would it be marketable?</i>	Maybe
8) <i>Would it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?</i>	Targeted
9) <i>Would it be feasible to enact the mechanism?</i>	Yes
10) <i>Would it be sustainable long-term?</i>	Yes
11) <i>Would it provide additional funding over the current funding?</i>	Yes

6. Expand use of conservation license and make it a requirement for wildlife viewing

1) <i>Would it have state-wide support?</i>	Yes
2) <i>Would it attract a broad range of interests?</i>	No
3) <i>Would it have organized opposition?</i>	Yes
4) <i>Would the administrative costs be burdensome?</i>	Yes
5) <i>Would it supply a consistent revenue stream?</i>	Unknown
6) <i>Would the individuals who benefit contribute?</i>	Yes
7) <i>Would it be marketable?</i>	Yes
8) <i>Would it provide funding for broad or targeted benefits for Montana wildlife?</i>	Broad
9) <i>Would it be feasible to enact the mechanism?</i>	Maybe
10) <i>Would it be sustainable long-term?</i>	Yes
11) <i>Would it provide additional funding over the current funding?</i>	Yes

Next Meeting

The final Finding Common Ground meeting will take place on February 25 at Montana Wild in Helena. While everyone present expressed an interest in attending in person, video links to the regional offices may be needed if that isn't possible.