

## **Region 6 Citizens Advisory Committee**

DATE: Thursday, January 18, 2018

TIME: 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

PLACE: Fort Peck Hatchery, Fort Peck, MT

Region 6 CAC members present: Scott Azure, Jay Crandell, Ken Forbregd, Ron Garwood, Perri Jacobs, Dirk Monson, Tyler Tarum, Aaron Wittmer, and Mike Kinsey representing Mark Azure.

Region 6 CAC members not present: Damien Austin, Mark Azure, Kelly Jones, Brian Olson

FWP members present: Steve Dalbey, Dave Fuller, LaWana Grewe, Tyler Haddix, Scott Hemmer, Landon Holte, Ron Howell, John Huberty, Marc Kloker, Mark Sullivan, Scott Thompson, Todd Tryan.

Guests attending the meeting: Commissioner Logan Brower, Aaron Johnson and Shay Piedalue (USFWS), Don Kaveshan (Walleye spawn and survey), and Dave Kloker.

**Handouts provided:** Agenda, CWD Management FAQs, MT Joint Mussel Response Team Q&A, Fact Sheet - Pittman-Robertson funding for FWP Enforcement, MFWP Hunting & Trapping Regulation Review Work Group Charter-Aug 16, 2017, minutes of last meeting, travel forms.

Mark Sullivan welcomed the attendees. Marc Kloker asked everyone to introduce themselves and answer the question, 'What is your favorite cold weather activity?'.

### **Follow up and review of action items from September meeting**

On reaching out of state hunters with information – FWP has the option for people to sign up for gov delivery, which will automatically send AP releases. When news releases are sent out by AP they network to other states. Social media is effective, Region 6 Facebook page has 5000 followers. (Marc Kloker)

Hunter etiquette, landowner stewardship brought up to date – It is in the works. Greg Lemon, Communication & Education Administrator, plans to redo it. The information on the website now is good, but outdated. (Marc Kloker)

Can elk cross APR's bison fence – The fence is elk friendly although, findings show that collared elk did not encounter the fence. APR had evidence of the elk crossing the fence. (Scott Thompson)

Re-engaging in St. Mary working group in regard to Fresno/Nelson – Perhaps due to changes in Washington, DC there will be renewed efforts. FWP will be at the table when it convenes. (Steve Dalbey)

How does shocking impact trout – Tyler Haddix will give trout fisheries update today that will answer this question.

## **Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) update** – Scott Hemmer

A video presentation by Dr. Emily Almberg, FWP veterinarian was viewed. Without management we will likely see decreases in deer populations. In 2017 a citizen advisory panel was formed. Henry Gordon, a Chinook area resident, served on this panel. Montana had a positive confirmation of CWD in October of 2017. A CWD Response Plan was formed to manage CWD. The plan was presented for public comment. It has not been approved but FWP is following the directives from it. It is not realistic to eradicate it. Montana's goal is to keep it at 5% or less. In the year 2018, northeast Montana is the surveillance area.

The first place it was detected in Montana was Phillipsburg in 1999 at an elk game farm. All the states surrounding Montana, except Idaho, have found CWD. Alberta, Canada does quite a bit of testing. It is worrisome to know that Saskatchewan, Canada is not nearly as stringent in their testing. New York appears to be the only state to have success eradicating the disease.

Frequent updating of results. With submission for testing the hunter is given a reference number. Results are posted online.

CWD is a slow-moving disease. Incubation period of 16-17 months. By the time CWD is found it has likely already been on the landscape 5-10 years. Testing can be done on lymph nodes or brain stem (obex). There is currently no testing capable of detecting the CWD prion in the meat.

Currently a CWD hunt is taking place near Chester, MT. It is called the Sage Creek CWD Hunt. FWP is not looking to reduce the mule deer population with this hunt. But, it takes a large number of animals to get a large enough sample size to accurately determine the prevalence and distribution of the disease. A survey flight shows the herd size within the Sage Creek Hunt area to be approximately 700. Based on that figure, 157 animals need to be tested. Bucks are more apt to be infected, due to their behavior, interaction and movement in the landscape.

Scott Thompson mentioned that our liberal harvest opportunities do help Montana contain CWD.

*Perri Jacobs* – Is Crow Agency involved?

Scott Hemmer – They were invited to work with FWP

*Aaron Wittmer* – Any changes to how tags are sold for these hunts to give locals or landowners opportunity?

*Perri Jacobs* – No different than a concert ticket.

If you see a sick deer call a warden or biologist. A decision on how to respond will depend upon location.

(Dave Fuller)

Collection sites for R6 in 2018 are still being determined. For sure, the Havre office and the Glasgow office.

(Ron Howell)

Region 6 will be a surveillance area in 2018. FWP will pay the fee to test a deer harvested in a surveillance area. The hunter will be required to pay the fee if outside of the surveillance area. (Mark Sullivan)

*Dave Kloker* – How much is the testing?

The test is \$17. Unfortunately, the cost of overnight shipping is expensive, more than the test itself. (Scott Hemmer)

Use of unused tag considered? (Landon Holte)

No. (Scott Hemmer)

*Ken Forbregd* – Are the animals born with CWD?

Yes, but low. (Scott Hemmer)

*Aaron Wittmer* – Will the current transportation restriction zones carry over to 2018?

Yes, they will be enlarged and defined. Think of disposal before-hand! (Scott Hemmer)

### **Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)** – Landon Holte

AIS came to North America on shipping ballast tanks to the Great Lakes about 10 years ago. Larvae discovered in Montana in 2016. There are five AIS supervisors in Montana. Landon's territory is basically Billings then north and east. Tom Woolf, Aquatic Invasive Species Bureau Chief, formerly served in Idaho. He brings much experience and knowledge to the fight against AIS.

Funding for AIS inspections came through hydro-electric fees and anglers were charged an additional fee with their fishing license. Residents paid \$2.00, non-residents paid \$15.00. These fees sunset in 2019.

85,700 inspections conducted in 2017. Found 17 vessels with mussels. Most of those were coming from the Midwest on I90 and I94. Many of the boats were being transported through Montana, not launching in Montana waterbodies. None of the mussels were alive, which lowers the risk. Actions taken on boats found with mussels are to decontaminate them with a 140-degree water bath and they can be quarantined for a 10-day dry period.

What are the fines? (Mark Sullivan)

The fines are hefty if knowingly launch an uninspected boat. There are fines for transporting illegal bait as well. (Ron Howell)

The Zebra Quagga Mussel is the invasive species that gets the most attention and deservedly so. They harm waterbodies and ecosystems. They clog and damage infrastructure. They need water to live. Without water they have a short life span.

In November of 2016 mussel larvae was detected in Tiber and suspect in Canyon Ferry. Governor Bullock declared a Natural Resource Emergency. Incident command was put in place elevating FWP and Department of Natural Resources (DNRC) to respond to AIS. In 2017 mandatory water inspections were put in place at Tiber and Canyon Ferry. Watercraft entering the state and crossing west over the continental divide must be inspected. The number of inspection stations was increased from 17 to 35. Stations were at regional FWP offices and roadside in key locations to catch traffic flow coming into Montana. One hundred and sixty seasonal workers were employed. Glacier National Park and Big Horn Canyon National Recreation Area partner with us and run their own inspection stations.

Local Boater Programs have been set up for convenience at Tiber (549 certified) and Canyon Ferry (1790 certified). FWP has expanded its lab capacity for early detection. Monitoring is in place: shoreline surveying

with dogs, diver/snorkeling surveys and sampling of substrate. It takes 4-5 years of negative results to get a clean rating.

*Logan Brower* – Can Fort Peck Reservoir have a local boater program?

No, where would it stop. We would have to keep doing it for other waterbodies. (Landon Holte)

*Dirk Monson* – After the first inspection, subsequent inspections are quick when you show them your paperwork from that first one.

R6 Stations in 2017 were at Culbertson, Fresno, Fort Peck Info Booth and Fort Peck Roving Crew and at the Regional offices in Glasgow and Havre. The inspection sites were open mid-April through mid-October. The Fort Peck Info Booth is an awkward site. Traffic comes at it three ways. The boats coming through this location are mostly Glasgow and Fort Peck residents. Operations for 2018 will see some location changes. The Culbertson station will be moved to Nashua. Discussion is being held with the McCone County Conservation District for them to staff a site at Flowing Wells. For Fort Peck there would be two roving crews, one for each side of the lake. Fresno would be the same as 2017 with perhaps extended hours. There will be more staff training. Electronic data collection will begin in 2018 with tablets for entering data from each inspection as it occurs. A passport will be implemented to expedite inspections. FWP will be working more with local and regional entities and conservation districts. AIS inspection awareness has increased. Word of mouth has helped get the message out. Seasonal workers are seeing more compliance, for example drain plugs are being pulled out in advance of the inspection by the boater. It was a positive season.

*Ken Forbregd* – Having a site at Nashua will speed it up for Culbertson residents heading to Fort Peck. He expects to hear less complaints from his area.

*Logan Brower* – Any new funding?

For the next legislative session there is a proposal for all boaters to pay a fee. (Landon Holte)

**Action item:** Perri Jacobs - Is there a natural predator or disease coming that would rid of AIS?

Currently there are round gobies that prey on mussels, but they do not eradicate them. They are another non-native that could potentially cause another problem. (Steve Dalbey)

Environmental DNA testing was done at Tiber and there was one positive hit. (Scott Hemmer)

100% effective solution is to drain a waterbody and let it sit idle. (Landon Holte)

**Missouri River Trout Fisheries Update** – Tyler Haddix

Tyler's work on pallid sturgeon is funded through the Army Corps of Engineers.

Management work for Tyler began in 2006 for the Missouri River below Fort Peck Dam.

Sampling began in 2013 of the water below the dam, known as the Tailrace. The survey area is from Boy Scout Park to the mouth of the Milk River, 6.5 river miles. Telemetry is used to monitor movement. At night biologists electroshock the fish. Shocking brings up fish that are 14" or longer. If the biologists wanted to survey smaller fish the electricity would be so high, it would impact the big fish. They tag every fish that is netted. A PIT tag goes inside the fish with a unique number on it. Tagging the fish gives modeling information so a population assessment can be made.

Trout are sight feeders. Rainbow trout in this area do not move much. Brown trout in this area in comparison move more. The population of the Rainbow trout has remained pretty much the same from 2013 to 2017. If anything, it may have gone up. The data in this time frame shows that the bigger Rainbows are declining in weight. However, the small Rainbows are plump. The Brown trout population from 2013 to 2017 has also remained the same or has gone down. There is a much denser population of Rainbow trout, ten Rainbows to one Brown. Natural mortality is occurring. There also are a few reproducing Salmon. The Salmon are food deprived when compared to those on Fort Peck Reservoir.

On the river, the fishing pressure has increased 56 percent. Some anglers are after walleye. This fishery is about a few big fish! If overharvested the size range of the fish would alter. The regulations for this area of the river state a two (2) trout limit. Typical fishermen, in general, don't keep the fish. They employ catch and release fishing. Tyler's advice is if you hook a fish poorly, keep it. From March 1 – July 31<sup>st</sup> this section, known as Skyberg's Channel is closed to fishing for spawning. Montana FWP paid for gravel in this section to improve the habitat for spawning.

*Tyler Tarum* – What is the average lifespan?

Seven years to nine years old, generally a 22" – 25" fish. (Tyler Haddix)

*Ron Garwood* – Do Browns spawn in the fall?

Yes. (Tyler Haddix)

*Marc Kloker* – What about Lake trout spawn?

They spawn in the dredge cuts to the Tailrace. (Tyler Haddix)

*Scott Thompson* – Where did the Chinook Salmon come from?

The 2011 high water flushed the Chinook Salmon. They are still there reproducing. It is a small sustaining fishery. (Tyler Haddix)

*Ron Garwood* – What about Pallid Sturgeon?

Pallid spawn late June to early July. They are old fish that are on their way out. There is no natural recruitment. MT FWP has been stocking them since 1998. These are healthy hatchery fish. The habitat needs to change to enable them to reproduce. When Garrison Dam went in the Pallid Sturgeon became endangered. It has been determined that if Fort Peck Dam would release 20,000 to 35,000 cfs of water it would greatly change the future of the Pallid Sturgeon. (Tyler Haddix)

**Enforcement Review: Pittman Robertson funding, Regulation Review Committee – Ron Howell**

70,000 hours of warden enforcement work has been cut by the implementation of PR funding. Region 6 will basically only have three field wardens doing enforcement work. There will be significant impacts, fishing will suffer. Wardens will get some hours on the water for boat safety.

There has been a rash of headless deer this year. We've been taking pictures.

*Perri Jacobs* – Who is responsible for bringing this change forward in the session?

I cannot remember the name. I will get the name to the CAC members of the representative responsible.

(Ron Howell)

*Perri Jacobs* - Are you keeping stats on unsolved cases or cases you are not able to get to due to PR funding?

Yes. We record through CAD a log even if we can't respond to the call due to lack of enforcement hours.

(Ron Howell)

*Perri Jacobs* – Can you provide the CAC with a list and amount of cases you were unable to get to due to PR funding?

Yes. (Ron Howell)

*Ken Forbregd* – Is there a follow-up to the shooting in McCone County?

Once a ticket is written, the public can view the ticket, the disposition and the fine. It is acceptable to visit with the County attorney where the violation occurred. (Ron Howell)

Ron is serving on the Regulation Review Committee. It is a task force of ten people. The first meeting was held in December 2017. The final recommendations are due December 20, 2018.

Here are five questions posed to the CAC members.

- 1) Do you agree regulations are too complicated and hard to understand? Do they need simplified?
- 2) Would you like to see a definition page?
- 3) Do legal descriptions need to be in the hunting regulations or be elsewhere?
- 4) For example, HD 630 in Valley County, should there be separate listings for elk and for deer?
- 5) Can we simplify what a license is for?

The CAC was given the 2017 MT Deer-Elk-Antelope regulations and the Wyoming regulations. Montana has 115 pages, Wyoming 60 pages. An item of note is the definition page in the Wyoming regulations. Montana certainly needs a definition page included in their regulations. Items that are constantly asking to be define include: shooting from a vehicle and trail camera vs. motion tracking device. There are some legal things that cannot be changed due to A.R.M. and statutes. We would like to cut out the repetition. We also want to see consistency in the regulations.

*Perri Jacobs*- Are we talking consistency in East/ West or Region specific?

*Aaron Wittmer* – Can deputies assume the duties of a warden?

They can address trespass issues. (Ron Howell)

**Action Item:** Due to the discussion regarding PR funding the CAC is going to discuss whether or not this is something they want to take on as an action item, with regards to writing a letter to appropriate representatives.

### **Round Table**

Scott Azure: EHD/Blue tongue was found from Poplar to Macon, Hwy 13. Deer numbers are down on the River bottom. We have seen headless deer as well. There is no overtime for wardens. We suspect it is youth at night. Ice fishing is good at the mouth of the Poplar River and Milk River. There is a lot of snow cover up north.

Ron Garwood: Happy to report there have not been dead deer along the Milk River. I appreciate seeing wardens driving down my road. I would hate to see that decrease in the future. Low hunter success during elk shoulder season is frustrating. While on the TC Access Rd saw two flocks of sage grouse, approx. 50 in each. Would encourage support for the St. Mary River Project. Also support the Cat Fish Classic and Walleye Tournaments. The FWP Bison EA is causing division in a lot of groups. If we keep buffalo as livestock, they would be controlled by the Dept. of Livestock. A bison ordinance was passed two years ago, and the Valley County Conservation District will be putting it on the ballot again Fall of 2018 to tweak it.

Ken Forbregd: No EHD/blue tongue in the Culbertson area. Deer and pheasants are healthy along the river bottom. Fishing is very good. When the water fluctuates it makes it dangerous. Ling are on the rebound, in fact they are everywhere. Seeing predator birds (eagles and hawks) in high numbers. I have also seen three snow owls this winter.

Dirk Monson: I am hearing lots of CWD talk. People enjoyed the hunting season. West of Glasgow in early and late fall I noticed I was not seeing as many whitetail deer. I see simplifying regulations as a gift to non-resident hunters. Anything to simplify for Montanans and non-residents is a benefit.

Perri Jacobs: I will write a support letter for changes to PR funding. I have coyotes. Please send coyote hunters my way. I had happy hunters during the season, good deer and antelope success. Now have about 20 deer eating our haystack.

Commissioner Logan Brower: FWP is in the public comment period for season setting. CWD is a learning curve for everyone. The probability is if we are looking for it, we will find it. I am your conduit to Helena, don't hesitate to contact me.

Mike Kinsey: Fort Belknap hunters were pretty successful. There were a few poaching incidents.

Aaron Wittmer: Havre has had lots of trespass and poaching incidents. Reports from his friends suggest that cow elk hunting was poor due to access issues. There are lots of coyotes, hawks and owls in the Havre area.

Jay Crandell: Seeing more whitetail deer than last year. Pretty good size herds of antelope. Pheasants around homesteads are doing well. Number of resident hunters were down. Wind and rumor of low bird numbers equaled low number of hunters. Saw for the first time ever a sage grouse along the Canadian border. No real issues in the Scobey area. Little snow cover, seems to be easy for the wildlife.

Tyler Tarum: Sharptail bird numbers are down. Will there be an increase in mule deer tags? Does the shoulder season for elk do any good? People get R6 elk permits/licenses then don't come hunt. Could there be a requirement to only allow elk hunting in a district you have an elk permit for (like it is with mule deer permits)?

The population is there to support higher numbers of mule deer B-licenses. Visit with Drew Henry after the harvest surveys are in. The two-week break between the regular season and the shoulder season is to allow the elk to redistribute. Aerial surveys will show if we are getting numbers closer to the objective. The commission is looking at extending the shoulder season to one month. We would like to see elk permits the same as with mule deer. That you can't hunt for elk anywhere else. (Scott Thompson)

Ken Forbregd: Going back to what Perri said. Are we going to take the PR funding issue back to our communities and ask for their support? We need enforcement.

The CAC does have clout that they could use on this issue. (Mark Sullivan)

**Action item:** Revisit Fisheries budget, effect on stocking Rainbow trout.

Shay Piedalue – My fieldwork includes HD 652. I am seeing mule deer herds of 15-20. I appreciate the news releases that Marc sends out by email. USFWS has dwindling law enforcement officers yet our jurisdictional acres, 1.1 million, have increased with no one staffed in Jordan, Montana at this time.

For the next meeting Mark Sullivan suggested a field trip in the Havre area. Perri Jacobs said that would be fine along as we saved enough time to come back to the action items, particularly the enforcement funding.

**The next meeting will be June 2018 in the Havre area for a field trip, with time allotted for action items. It will probably be on a Thursday with date to be determined. Emails will be sent out in May with the date.**