



MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

R1 CAC Meeting - 5/2/2018

The Outside Is In Us All, & The State of Wildlife in NW Montana

Present:

- FWP - Commissioner Tim Aldrich, Jim Williams, Dillon Tabish, Neil Anderson, Lee Anderson, Dave Landstrom, Tim Manley, Bruce Sterling, Tonya Chilton, Diane Boyd, Jessy Coltrane, Tim Their, Kristy Personett, Martha Abbrescia
- CAC - DJ Rankosky, Joe Rudolph, Nicole Stickney, Bob Faulkner, Arlie Burk, Thad Briggs, Kyle Smalley, Larry Rattray, Darwon Stoneman, Jessie Walthers, Bob Faulkner
- CAC Alumni - Chuck Hunt, Jerry Smalley, Tony Anderson, Mike Shepard, Larry Lack
- Others: Sherm Russell, Jim Vashro

The Outside is in us All video

Tim Aldrich – update on last Commission meeting

- Mandatory kill for brown trout Kootenai River
- Final CWD plan approved
- Madison River Recreation Plan
- River recreation management boils down to social issues, allocation of opportunities is secondary
- Statewide Forestry Management Plan
- Open mic sheep comment drew a lot of attention
- Get involved, get informed and engage; like the people in this room

The State of Wildlife IN NW Montana -

Neil Anderson:

- We need to manage for the future

Jessy Coltrane:

Summary of WT Deer data

- Surveys are really looking for trends in recruitment; fawns/adult
- Harvest data thru call in surveys; little lower last year
- Spring green up surveys; down last year
- Check station data – get success rate, but really great biological data from tooth pulling

Mountain Lion Harvest review

- Comprehensive report online
- Doesn't equate to deer populations
- Pretty steady
- Finalizing management plan

- Population trends are based on IPM
- Estimated R1 population is 1000-1500

Mountain Goats

- Handed out report of data from 1954 on
- Has been a horrible downward trend – you really can kill the last one
- Attending National working group in 2 weeks

Tim Thier:

Mule deer harvest data

- There has been a more acute decrease in harvest in NW MT but true across State. If we could keep around 1500 for mule deer buck harvest, would be good. Occasional spikes occur over time.
- We had our peak in 2005 in HD 110. Why is this? Did the fire make the habitat that much better?
- Mule deer are just laying down and dying. Predators play a part but there's more to the story. Blue Tongue was also an issue in 2016.
- 3 studies started: 30 radio collars in Fisher, Whitefish Range, Choteau. Three year study focusing on habitat

Bruce Sterling:

Elk survey data

- There has been a decrease in harvest.
 - HD 121 (premier hunting in R1) - bull and calf ratio down, pretty consistent populations
 - Surveys are about timing and sometimes not ideal
 - 1996 went to brow-tined regulation
 - Average age of harvest is 3.8
 - 2016 no harvest of 5.5 yr old or better
 - HD 140 – dropped in the last few years
 - HD 150 – “
- Bull elk harvest
 - There has been a drop off in brow-tined bull harvest only, however the harvest for the region is actually pretty flat
- Big Horn Sheep surveys – really difficult to survey as they are very time & temperature specific
 - HD 124 best of harvest in R1

Diane Boyd:

Wolves

- Statewide min 633, 124 packs, 63 breeding pair
- 2016 POM estimate was 851; POM is 10-30% above normal survey estimates
- R1 – 237, 38 packs, 25 breeding pair
- Starting in 2011, peak then slight decrease R1 & statewide
- Harvest increasing slightly; R1 is 1/3 of State
- Average daily consumption of protein is 8-16 lbs
- Summer kill more due to doe/fawn

- Many factors in deer kill

Tonya Chilton:

Black Bear

- MT ranks 4th in the Nation for bear harvest
- Bear harvest on average is stable
- R1 takes 40% annually of the statewide harvest; ~500
- Mandatory reporting started 1985; is important but expensive and time consuming
- We do have concerns about some specific HD's; female harvest
- Working with U of M to utilize the IPM (Integrated Population Model) which looks at systems and variables from all info: harvest, population metrics, food productivity

Moose

- Surveys – lots of variables; 1996 didn't have \$ to survey as many districts
- Harvest data – bulls only harvest, decline stabilized
- Moose key into cutting units (1980's); Jesse's info is on our website, location dependent on how moose are doing (MN is different to WY)
 - Lambda – female dependent population trend
 - Rocky mountain front – increasing
 - Cabinets – stable (have lots of cover)
 - Big Hole – declining

Neil Anderson:

- What drives populations?
 - Weather, Habitat (forage, cover, water), Hunting, Predation, Competition, Disease
- What has changed –
 - predation from wolf, lion, black bear, grizzly bear (NCDE pop 1000, CYE pop 50),
 - human development; headwaterseconomics.org
 - timber harvest; corporate and National Forest timber harvest declined
- fire and elk forage quality; elk move to ag, they like grass
- timber harvest & regeneration
 - takes 25-40 yrs for marketable trees, final harvest 65-120 yrs
 - no winter range in R1
- WTD buck harvest & timber harvest
 - More harvest on non-corporate lands
- Ag in FH & Sanders County
 - Producing less alfalfa, game damage issues rising
- Buck deer population trends; gap between WT & Mule deer is growing
- Roads
 - Elk go away from roads to bigger blocks of land, further away from roads during archery
 - Elk will move to canopy, no roads, block of acres
 - Have to balance roads/access with opportunity
 - Have to be strategic on what roads are open; plenty of pressure on animals in roaded areas

General discussion between Wildlife & CAC members:

- Contemplating utilizing cameras for population studies (ID is using)
- Hunters are easiest to control, MT hunters staying stable
- What is valuable to hunters, big bucks or what?
- Antler restrictions can cause hunters to leave game in the field
- Wolves/predators:
 - on game before hunters,
 - quotas on lion (don't like)
 - Management is learning, looking at different management tools, female and male licenses
 - Be more creative/active on wolf
 - Trapping is handicapped
 - Trappers association says no snares; would catch too many deer
 - Hunters don't want to pay the \$19 for wolf and don't understand where the \$ goes
 - Wolves had been eliminated, elk changed behavior when wolf were introduced
 - Population declines not all due to wolves
 - Elk are where there are no wolves and not hunting
 - POM # doesn't account for all hunters
- FWP sees increase in elk, landowners/hunters don't
- Spring surveys for elk are due to wintering under canopy (hard to see)
- Elk move...distribution changes
- Other groups being heard more than hunters
- Science is evolving, not one singular variable, it is many. We don't have all the answers, cumulative effect on variables.
- We must be careful socially; can't lose hunts for bears, lions due to the "landscape of fear"
 - FWP manages wildlife for the "people"
 - How do we let people know what we do?
 - Poaching effects on populations
 - Take your legislator to breakfast once/year; fall meeting – CAC members are influential
 - Habitat MT – great resource

Tim Aldrich:

- Science is where our decisions need to live and puts his faith in FWP biologists. Leave it out of politician's hands.

Next mtg: 5/31, 5:00 BBQ @ Lone Pine, theme is "Outdoor Recreation"