



**Region 5 Citizen Advisory Collective Meeting  
July 29, 2026  
Montana FWP Region 5 Office  
2300 Lake Elmo Dr., Billings, MT 59105**

**\*\*Current CAC members must reapply by Sept. 14 if they are still interested in serving. These applications will be considered alongside all other applications.**

*Agenda times are subject to change.  
CAC meetings are open to the public.*

**2:30 p.m. – Welcome and introductions**

**CAC:** Doug Dreezen, Lee Deming, Josh McQ, Bruce, Kayhan, Chris Fleck, Anne Marie, Pat Riley, Susan Gilbertz

**Staff:** Chrissy Webb, Bryan Giordano, Derek Fagone, Quentin Kujala, Jeff Hindoién, Shawn Stewart, Shannon Blackburn, Ryder Paggen, Ian Davidson, Mike Ruggles

**Virtual staff:** Jason Kool, Kevin Podruzny, Molly Parks

**Public:** Kevin Holland Billings, Ron Normandeau Billings, Phil Gilbert Laurel, Ty Stubblefield Bridger, Brett Enright Bridger

**2:45 p.m. – CAC member requested topic updates**

**Corner Crossing**

- Based on a May 2026 FWP analysis conducted by our geographic data services staff, FWP estimates there are approximately 874,600 acres of corner-locked public land which is inaccessible for public access. Of the 874,600 acres of public land, approximately 245,752 acres (28%) are currently open to public access through partnerships with willing private landowners participating in FWP's access programs.
- Almost one third of corner-locked public land has been opened annually through FWP's access programs such as Block Management or the Public Access Land Agreement program.
- Because our access programs have been successful, Private Land/Public Wildlife Advisory Committee (PL/PW) was asked by the Director to develop access program solutions to secure more public access to these corner-locked public lands.

- At their June 2026 meeting, PL/PW reviewed existing FWP access to public lands programs and identified the best components of these existing programs. For example, they emphasized the importance of making land improvements to facilitate or mitigate the impacts of public access. This could include installing a gate or improving a parking area.
- Based on PL/PW's recommendations, FWP staff are working on a concept that would take the best of existing access to public lands programs and streamline it into one program with an emphasis on corner-locked public land situations.
  - Option to provide improvement projects on property
  - Use revenue from the Home to Hunt program
  - Aim to have a project in place by fall 2026
- Some landowners in existing programs have concerns about corner crossing; some have pulled out of programs
- **CAC question:** what is the legal standing of corner crossing in MT?
  - **FWP response:** corner crossing constitutes trespass in Montana, longstanding position and supported by FWP policy. Current lawsuit in place brought by BHA and PLWA.
  - Additional discussion with questions and experiences on the topic was shared.

**FWP Access Programs to Public Land Table-see associated document.**

#### **Grizzly bear management changes**

- Potential changes coming for grizzly bear management after US Fish & Wildlife Service proposed a revision of the 4(d) provision of the ESA Listing. No final rule has been published at this time.
  - Details from USFWS: <https://www.fws.gov/grizzlyrulemaking>
  - Public comment will be taken until Aug. 17, 2026
- States would have more discretion and management flexibility, particularly in areas outside of the recovery areas.
- For public, grizzly bear management may not look overtly different in many places.
- If grizzly bears are delisted, hunting for grizzlies would not be allowed in Montana for at least 5 years.
- Take limitations under current 4d rule
  - Revised rule would allow more methods of take, which also refers to hazing or disturbing bears and not restricted to removal.
- Management would change based on geographic location and recovery status in that area
- Listing status is not being discussed currently
- **CAC question:** biologist perspective on proposed rule revision?
  - **FWP response:** conservative, long-term GB management is possible
- **CAC question:** transfer of grizzly bears across different ecosystems?
  - **FWP response:** Two bears have been transported from the NCDE to GYE. One male and one female.
    - Region 5 has a technician specifically for transferring grizzly bears and working with bear conflicts.

- Female grizzly from NCDE has two cubs in GYE. Success will be based on survival of cubs and their future contributions to the GYE population.
- **CAC question:** Why aren't there more county/town ordinances on dealing with wildlife?
  - **FWP response:** FWP does not have authority to implement these. There are limitations for FWP to cite/fine the public for feeding wildlife. City/county ordinances are not created or enforced by FWP.

Grizzly bear reports are available online here:

[Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee \(IGBC\) - ID, MT, WY, WA](#) Link to reports.

FWP specific grizzly bear management info:

[Bears In Montana | Montana FWP](#)

### **Rock Creek water rights**

- Rock Creek is chronically dewatered
- FWP proposed the purchase of water rights (3 cfs) on West Fork Rock Creek to maintain flows to benefit fishery
- Meeting held in Red Lodge Representative Barker invited Director Clark to discuss issue.
- No longer pursuing this water rights purchase
  - Local frustration about the public participation process from people interested in ecological health of Rock Creek.
  - Purchase not supported by local political figures and irrigation district, lots of local pushback
  - Concerns of abandonment of the water rights presented by the irrigation district and local state legislators with DNRC were not dismissed.

### **Wolf population estimate tools**

- Population tracking methods have changed over time. FWP continues to update monitoring tools with changes in population.
- Integrated Patch Occupancy Model (iPOM) has been used for wolf population estimates. Recent updates on the model were shared as the agency has been working on iPOM2
- Model updates
  - Trapping and collaring were the basis of population estimation when the population was limited and packs were more discrete. When counts exceeded 500 wolves and packs were less discrete over a larger landscape it was difficult to populate iPOM1.
  - FWP continues to collect field data through surveys and collars but needs more information for better estimates. Minimum count comes from original work and now includes hunter observation and field verification of hunter observations as secondary field data.
  - Changes in assumptions include pack competition and size, pack density, that are part of a territory model.
  - Estimates are similar in trends but lower in iPOM2 than in POM1. The methods have been reviewed by USGS and are being independently reviewed for professional publication.
  - iPOM2 estimates about 25 wolves in region 5 iPOM2 shows an increase but within errors of IPOM1.

- CAC reports of wolves in Musselshell valley are not shown in reports. May be related to timing of reports and range
- Shawn Stewart provided information that there are no established packs, in recent counts in Wildlife Region 5. This information is supported by trapper data with limited to no captures in recent years.

#### **Access projects**

- **Twin Bridges**
  - In negotiation BNSF/NRD
  - Option to provide development money.
  - FWP would like to move forward but no agreement is in place.
- **Whitebird**
  - EA in place, survey of easements completed and bridge is selected. Working possibly get the bridge replaced late this fall early winter or next spring.
- **Thompson Island sites**
  - DES working with FWP lands for this Stillwater County Island near Whitebird FAS
- **Tucker Creek opportunity**
  - Property currently for sale within “access desert” along Yellowstone River between Columbus and Park City. It is in an area that has not seen much river change.
  - Property has the headgate for big ditch and ditch.
  - There may be opportunities to work with lesser to have improved river access in the area.
  - Exploring options with partners.
  - Backup plan to make improvements at existing DNRC sites in the area.
- **Bundy**
  - The boat ramp has been out of commission since 2018 when it was eroded away.
  - \$2 million is the current estimate to fix the site.
  - Some DJ boat money is available, potentially other funds. Working on a plan with BLM, COE, and others.
  - **CAC question:** access across river from Bundy for Bridge Access; the ditch has large rocks placed by a local landowner that stops people from safely getting off the road. Is FWP doing anything?
  - **FWP response:** Contacted Yellowstone County Planner with issue as it is a county road right of way.
- **Two Leggins and Bighorn River access**
  - Floodplain permit: out for public notice.
  - FWP has some potential contractors.
  - General Custer boat ramp is also in permitting phase with floodplain remaining. Will also move road and touch up the site.
- **Captain Clark FAS**
  - Will likely address this ramp for improvements and repair once the other ramps are completed
- **CAC question:** visitation use at Bighorn River sites and work in conjunction with NPS?
  - **FWP response:** Use Counter (infrared sensor) at Bighorn FAS: some challenges in counting the use.
  - Anne Marie expressed frustration in working with FWP and NPS on developing use trends

- FWP added recreation technician to help manage the Bighorn and help with some data collection.
- Cameras are a tool to monitor river use but technology is emerging. FWP Region 5 is limited by money and staff to focus on the Bighorn and other waters for recreational or fishery creel work.
- Anne Marie will follow up with Ryder on recreation use. Ryder will create a one page write up on use of Bighorn and current plans.
- **CAC question:** Chris Fleck and Anne Marie expressed concerns about people coming to other waters when Yellowstone River hoot owl restrictions are in place particularly on Stillwater and Bighorn rivers. Is there potential to widen the restrictions to protect the other local fisheries
  - **FWP response:** rarely imposes restrictions on other waters that don't meet the standards for Hoot Owl restrictions in flow and temperature.
  - Fisheries is working on pilot study to conduct a creel survey on the Bighorn River and work with Parks and Outdoor Recreation for use of staff along with fisheries staff to use existing funds and positions to gather some data. There is angler pressure data on rivers across the state with every two-year fisheries mail creel. River recreation is harder to monitor and assess. Liam with FWP is working on river recreation trends.
- **Duck Creek North**
  - FWP is working with City of Billings for lease and boat ramp.
  - Access to river particularly when the river channel is dry at Duck Creek Bridge FAS.
  - Plans to fund the project could come from 2011 oil spill recreation funds.
  - There is good early support for project.
  - FWP working on EA for project
  - **CAC question:** concerns about the construction at Duck Creek County Bridge which is creating hazardous conditions for floaters in the area. He has concerns about how the temp bridge is going to be removed.
  - **FWP response:** Shannon has been working with the county to ensure removal to the riverbed. This didn't happen during the I-90 bridge project. Hopefully they will remove the temporary piers as expected. Brad and Demi FWP Fisheries and Megan Hoyer from DNRC were in the area a couple of weeks earlier in a boat and rescued one person from a pier and assisted another that was attempting to self-rescue. We have had other reports of close calls.

### 3:35 p.m. – Region 5 fisheries updates: Regulations and projects

#### Fish regulations and Statewide Fisheries Management Plan

- 2027-2028 cycle of regs
  - Proposed changes to bass regulations: Central and eastern districts—separate smallmouth and largemouth daily and in-possession limits. The proposed smallmouth change is to 10 daily and 20 in possession from 5 daily and in possession. Largemouth bass would remain at 5 daily and in possession.
- The agency is about to post the final package of regulations proposals for public comments.
  - They will move to the Fish and Wildlife Commission and will be on the October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2026 agenda. The comment period will start soon after the August 19 Commission meeting.
- A local public meeting will be held on August 18th at Billings Public Library. This public meeting is intended to review fish regulation proposals and the statewide fish management plan

- The May 2026 meeting allowed people to comment on initial regs (spring meeting) and had better than average attendance. FWP took comments from first round of meetings to create the final package that will be shared at upcoming public meetings across the state.
- **Statewide Fish Management Plan**
  - Created every 4 years and is by river basins.
  - The plan outlines goals by water bodies in the basins.
  - Public comments are not currently open but will be soon. Look for the public notice to come from HQs.

#### **4:15 Region 5 wildlife updates: Spring surveys and projects and weather impacts on mule deer populations**

##### **Mule deer populations and weather**

- Shawn Stewart presented 45 years of mule deer data and 100 years of weather data from the Magpie census area: HD 575 south of Columbus, between Fishtail and Nye. The area is 62 square miles, and Shawn has done surveys there since 1981.
- Trend: stable for first 20 years with some variation of troughs and peaks.
- Starting 2003: there is a steady and continually downward trend.
- Weather site: Mystic Lake power plant, 12 miles from MD trend area, with weather data from 1925-2026. This long-term snow data site is rare as there are only 2 in the area. The measure was to categorize lush summer vs drought summer and Mild snowfall vs severe snowfall
- 2005-2026: saw more drought and more severe winters for snowfall than any other period. This is a change in weather severity for wildlife.
- Lush summer to mild winter: increase MD count increase 11%.
- Average summer precipitation and average winter: counts stay the same.
- Drought year and/or severe winter leads to mule deer decreases by 8%.
- Last 24 years: 16 severe weather years. Only 3 years had lush summer or mild winter.
  - The result is fawn recruitment has dropped from 52 fawns/100 does to 23 fawns/100 does before 2005 and after 2005 in the data analysis.
- Other factors that could influence mule deer populations:
  - Elk population has increased significantly in area
  - Coyote numbers remain low in the area
  - Lions are difficult to establish trend data. Using lion harvest rates, the lion population seems to have declined since 2000.
  - Buck only regulations have been in place since 2013 for that hunting district. Mule deer buck harvest has declined.
  - Longterm weather changes are significantly driving the mule deer population. Populations likely won't fully rebound until the weather changes support recruitment. This year we had a mild winter and observed higher fawn recruitment.
- **CAC question:** Whitetail deer pops?
  - **FWP response:** Fawn recruitment: same trends as mule deer, which is decreasing.
- **CAC question:** How does climate change fit into this analysis? What does this mean long term. How does FWP plan long-term for deer management. Will the deer move to a new area?

- **FWP response:** This study is not predicting, it's showing what is happening. Mule deer populations may just stabilize at a new low level. Deer here won't move much as this is a nonmigratory population or has been historically.

#### **CWD and mule deer**

- We may not want high mule deer densities in areas with high prevalence of CWD. CWD management will likely be driving hunting regulations at some point.

#### **General mule deer discussion**

- **CAC question:** How does fire affect things?
  - **FWP response:** 2006 derby fire: burn and unburned areas have declined at the same rate. From this analysis, does not show any connection to driving mule deer populations in this area.
- **CAC question:** What are the changes in buck to doe ratios?
  - **FWP response:** Post seasons buck doe ratios were historically lower, now higher. Don't have hunting pressure or public access to get harvest rates up for mule deer bucks. Bucks spread CWD more than does. It has been shown that lower buck/doe ratios help keep prevalence down. Desirable to be 10 bucks per 100 does or lower in CWD areas.
- **CAC question:** Have you seen similar declines with other populations outside this area?
  - **FWP response:** Yes, sometimes it is even more drastic. Highest CWD rates in Region 5 is around Belfry.

#### **Antelope regulation changes for this season based on recently completed surveys:**

- HD506- No change in license quotas.
  - Total count last year, record low. Last year cut tags to bottom of quota range of 200. Increased numbers slightly in total numbers this year. Will allow time for some additional potential recovery.
  - 32 fawns:100 does
  - 58 bucks:100 does
- HD516-Proposed to decrease Either Sex licenses from 700 to 550 and maintain 50 Doe Fawn licenses.
  - Combined population objective is 6,500 to 8,000 total antelope; current combined estimate is 6,317 total antelope.
- HD501 West side
  - Trend area survey with a population estimate of 3107 which is 17 above the Long-Term Average (LTA) of 2665.
  - 57 fawns:100 does      LTA = 63 fawns:100 does
  - 36 bucks:100 does      LTA = 46 bucks:100 does
- HD513 East side
  - Total count 3,210 antelope which is 3% below the LTA of 3,293.
  - 46 fawns:100 does      LTA = 52 fawns:100 does
  - 35 bucks:100 does      LTA = 37 bucks:100 does
  - 2025 total harvest was 44% below LTA and 22% below the previous year's harvest.

- HD526- Proposed to decrease Either Sex licenses from 250 to 100, currently no Doe Fawn licenses.
  - LTA total antelope is 1204, 2026 estimate is 894 total antelope. 30% below the LTA.
  - Record low total antelope estimate.
  - 41 fawns:100 does                      LTA = 35 fawns:100 does
  - 18 bucks:100 does                      LTA = 34
  
- HD536 – Proposed to decrease ES licenses from 300 to 150, currently no DF licenses.
  - Population objective is 5,000 to 5,500 antelope.
  - Trend area survey estimate of 2,950 which is 24% below the LTA.
  - 38 fawns:100 does                      LTA = 60 fawns:100 does
  - 40 bucks:100 does                      LTA = 49 bucks:100 does
  - 2025 harvest was 48% below the LTA and 5% above the previous year's harvest.
  
- HD546 – No change in licenses
  - Population objective is 1,750 to 2,000 antelope.
  - Trend area survey estimate of 2,131 which is 8% above the LTA.
  - 58 fawns:100 does                      LTA = 77 fawns:100 does
  - 54 bucks:100 does                      LTA = 77 bucks:100 does
  - 2025 harvest was 9% above average.
  
- HD556 (512 +516)- No change in license numbers.
- HD512: Fairly stable being low for several years. Mostly stable for the last 4 years on the trend area. Only giving out 125 ES licenses in the whole district.
  - 56 fawns:100 does
  - 39 bucks:100 does
- HD516: Little increase in the trend count to 54 total antelope. Data that we collect is not widespread in this HD. More antelope outside of trends than inside of trends and in low density so aerial surveys are not cost efficient.
  - 23 fawns:100 does                      5th year with F:D ratio less than 25
  - 52 bucks:100 does
- HD556 harvest has increased slightly, and access has improved on east side of HD
  
- HD576 – No license quota changes. From east to west goes from well below average east to average numbers of antelope west.
  
- HD550-Total count last year was the lowest total count in at least 30 years. The estimate was high. Trend count this year 557 estimate.
  - 26 fawns:100 does                      LTA = 50 fawns:100 does
  - 39 bucks:100 does                      LTA = 34 bucks:100 does
  
- HD560-Trend count has been overestimating population. Last total count was two years ago. Use Expansion Factor 2851 total. Likely overestimating still but not too unrealistic.
  - 64 fawns:100 does                      LTA = 50 fawns:100 does
  - 39 bucks:100 does                      LTA = 30 bucks:100 does

- HD570-total count western 3rd of 576. 5324 total count is 4% above the long-term average. Trend area is basically stable from last year. Trend area has been creeping up little by little the last 3 years.
  - 54 fawns:100 does
  - 44 bucks:100 does
- HD586 –Increase ES licenses from 450 to 550ES licenses and 200DF to 350DF in response to increased antelope numbers.
  - Trend area count 50% increase in total count from estimate of the trend area last year. This district has increased every year for 4 years. Increased B licenses in 2024.
  - 80 fawns:100 does                      LTA = 62 fawns:100 does
  - 48 bucks:100 does                      LTA = 37 bucks:100 does
- HD596 – Proposed to decrease the DF licenses from 150 to 50 DF licenses. Buck doe ratios were average so no change to ES licenses.
  - Trend count estimate was 26 below LTA, lowest estimated population since 2013.
  - 42 fawns:100 does                      LTA = 42 fawns:100 does
  - 28 bucks:100 does                      LTA = 25 bucks:100 does

These are within quota range changes, so do not need to be approved by commission.

Biologists are recommending a future proposal to put back central antelope HD 575. Populations of antelope in the current 576 hunting district shows disparity in numbers and hunting opportunity from east to west. Going back the previous district structure would improve management of antelope in this area.

- **CAC question:** Seems like a lot of downward trends for antelope. Is weather driving this?
  - **FWP response:** Some blue tongue in antelope has been documented in the region. Blue tongue is more prevalent and has been documented but not sure it is a driver. A review has been started to evaluate weather analysis for antelope in the region. They are lacking good local weather data for this. Antelope are adapted differently than mule deer for drought and other annual weather.

If people haven't seen Back from the Brink: Montana's Wildlife Legacy it is worth the watch. [Back from the Brink: Montana's Wildlife Legacy](#)

#### 4:30 p.m. – CAC member roundtable

##### Susan Gilbertz:

- Had question about duck creek and those were addressed earlier.

##### Pat Riley:

- Drought has been hard in his area.
  - Minimal fires so far but high potential.
  - Animals are under lots of stress due to high temperatures and low moisture.
- Turkeys are doing well on property though varying in size of poults
- Has seen a lot of mule deer fawns but mostly closer to buildings

- Has seen lots of elk.
  - They aren't necessarily in his place but in the Roundup area there are a lot.

**Anne Marie Emery:**

- Follow up on deer that died along Bighorn River
  - **FWP response:** likely EHD not blue tongue.
- Some public does not support pheasant release: habitat improvement instead; shooting pen raised birds is not fun. Would like to see better use of public dollars.
  - **FWP response:** FWP starting stock pheasants in the early 1900s. Once established by the 1950's, studies showed there's little return of stocked birds to hunter harvest. Investment in rearing pheasants was high and didn't really drop off until late 1990's. This is a resurgence with good intent but may not be fully meeting objectives with mixed public support. In Region 5 it seems that pheasant stocking may mostly appeal to older hunters, hunters with young or older dogs, and provides some youth opportunity. FWP has heard similar concerns for the program. This is a legislative program and FWP is obligated to implement. May need more thorough review of the program and if it is meeting its objectives. Pheasant stocking is about the 3R's program recruitment, retention, and reactivation of hunters. Other states offer mentorships for hunting as an alternative to support R3 as well as other programs. When good habitat is occupied by wild pheasants stocked pheasants can have negative impacts. We are working to minimize those impacts and ensure reared pheasants are released in areas that can support them and allow public hunting. This is an item for the Fish and Wildlife Commission at the August 19<sup>th</sup> meeting: The EA evaluated adding other public land (federal) and private lands as release sites.

**Chris Fleck:**

- Concerns for angling pressure on Stillwater River. There is extra pressure due to many hoot owl restrictions on other popular rivers.
  - Increase in pressure is coming from commercial pressure in area. The river fish populations are still recovering from 2022 flood and would benefit from more protection.
- Potential to change to regulations in the area: barbless requirement and having a different set of regulations for a part of the river as a test area.
  - FWP response: FWP will provide more education on options. Mike asked fisheries to have more discussion and to pull in publications that speak to some of the ideas.
- Appreciated staff being present for the post-flood remediation tour and felt it was a very worthwhile event. There is a lot of new riprap from Absarokee down.

**Kayhan Ostovar:**

- Concerns about lack of gravel nesting sites for fish spawning on Stillwater system. Is there an option to supplement?
  - FWP response: Some discussion of habitat work in planning for the Stillwater.
- Working to have blood samples for turtles tested for PFAS concentrations. Turtles are long lived, may provide new insights into this issue.
- This year is the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the Yellowstone River clean up. Already crews have picked up 51,000 pounds of trash from the river. Above Columbus: scrap metal from derailment, and tar material continues to be found.

**Bruce Hoiland:**

- Fewer Roundup town deer than there used to be. He wondered if increased mountain lion predation on urban deer was happening and if so great as there have been a lot of deer in town causing damage.

**Josh McQuillan:**

- Bears in Red Lodge are a big issue this year. Is there an increase in bears in the area? What will the strategy be to deal with black bear conflicts? Can we adjust black bear hunting to help the situation? Not everyone has a bear proof garbage can in Red Lodge.
  - **FWP response:** working with Red Lodge mayor on local bear mgmt. Not an increase in bear numbers. Bear populations are estimated by backdating harvested bear ages. This process is slow—takes ~10 yrs to develop a population estimate. Harvest quotas are based on maximizing harvest that we can tolerate while maintaining stable population of ~500 black bears along Beartooth face. Habitat potential/projection map showed the highest population of black bears should be in Northwest MT. It also estimated the potential to support about 500 bears in the Beartooth's. A DNA study using hair samples: estimated 480 bears were in the Beartooth's. In 1986: the quota system for bear harvest was first started. We had previously been overharvesting bears in the area. Population peaked in early 2000's, with about 550 bears. Increased quota as population went up. Maximum female harvest is in place to maintain populations. Since 2010 we have been consistently overharvesting 4 to 5 females per year based on the quota and timing to close a district. Assuming population is correct, then we can't have a huge increase in bear if harvesting at this level. Significant increase is if estimate is totally wrong but there is no data to support this. Likely around 470 bears currently due to good production. Conflict isn't a good indicator of high or low bear populations but rather a limitation in available natural foods and areas with a lot of people tend to attract bears because of availability of human foods. Increase in bear conflicts this year likely due to poor natural food production. Nutritionally bears are stressed and it is showing up as skinny bears. Hunting would not have helped the situation. Suspicion of intentionally feeding wildlife in the area is occurring. If this is the case it would also contribute to an increase in conflicts. Bear conflict is not representative of population changes.

**Lee Demming:**

- Is there any info on the change in harvest limit for trout?
  - **FWP response:** No population changes have been documented in relationship to the regulation change. There isn't much harvest on trout in many trout waters. It will be challenging to measure changes related to the regulation if it can be measured.
- Why continue that regulation if we're not going to follow up on the impacts of that change? What is the status of the Angler log program? Was it valuable?
  - **FWP response:** Fisheries staff compared information from the angler logs to population trend data several years ago. It was interesting but not as informative as one might think. Participation from public was declining. Useful information about many fisheries was in the logs but it doesn't replace trend surveys.

- **Anne Marie:** an application used by guides on the Bighorn River was developed to track catches. It is hard to get participation for that, and it's simpler to do than the FWP mailed surveys.

**Doug Dreezen:**

- Fishing Access Sites look great this year. Nice job. Some transient people are regularly living at some access sites.
- Error in the deer/elk/antelope regulations: In the general information on page 31 under public land access, Lands administered by the National Parks Service it states: "Public lands closed to hunting include: National parks and other areas administered by the National Parks Service" There is an exceptions as hunting is allowed in the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area that is administered by the Park Service. He suggests a change to the regulations to better reflect that hunting is allowed in some NPS administered areas. Also questioned if this would mean waterfowl hunting in Afterbay Reservoir is allowed.
  - **FWP response:** will look into the issue and work with staff to change
- Resident elk permit application refunds: He was owed a refund of \$4 but it wasn't returned he asked other hunters that also didn't get their return if not drawn. Learned this fee would not be returned and felt many people would be upset. He has a friend that estimated the agency likely retained about \$192,000 and wondered where those funds went.
  - **FWP response:** Those funds will go to the general license account. General license dollars are very important to maintain FWP opportunities. A state of Montana mandate exists to not process refunds less than a certain dollar amount. The elk drawing is one of those. It is in the regulations and has changed since last year. This is after the meeting documentation. Page 12 of Deer/Elk/Antelope regulations Elk Permit Drawings only section indicates elk permits are nonrefundable. Mike noted the front desk had received some heated complaints about this change.

**6:00 p.m. – Dinner and conversation**

**6:45 p.m. – Restructuring the Citizens Advisory Council**

An updated charter for the CAC was recently completed and available on the FWP website [Region 5 Citizen Advisory Collective](#) and was distributed at the meeting. Several changes were made.

The name was changed but not the acronym. The acronym is well recognized for those that follow the agency. A review of all state agency councils, committees, and other groups was made by the state. There are statutes that have requirements of those bodies with many having sunset requirements. The CAC didn't meet those standards as it isn't a decision-making body, nor does it have a singular task assigned to it and has been standing since approximately 2005. To more appropriately name the group and avoid confusion with the statutory role of councils the word collective was selected as it maintained the acronym and by definition represents a group or a cooperative unit or organization.

The charter allows for renewal of membership at the end of a term; however, members must reapply and the agency advertises an open seat.

Recommendations for the size of a CAC were also updated.

Region 5 has not advertised an opening since 2019, with existing members agreeing to continue membership regularly when discussed in the past. The group from 2020 went from 18 members to 10 current members.

Region 5 will begin an effort to recruit new members and is asking all current members with interest to continue to reapply. Most interested people who are not on the committee are from the Billings area, as are several current members. The region's goal is to maintain or improve representation of outdoor interests. This group has a good diversity, and it is hoped to replicate as much diversity with interest in representation from outlying areas from Billings and interest in recruiting larger landowners and block management cooperators which are lacking in the current membership.

Membership normally has a 3-year voluntary appointment with a staggered membership. Since Region 5 will be starting all volunteers at the same time a strategy to stagger new members will be implemented. Based on applications this may be a simple drawing or asking prospective members if they have a preference as they start.

FWP will send applications by email to all current members, to those that asked to be considered leading up to this meeting and will have the application announced and posted on the website. Applications must be submitted by Sept. 14. Appointments are made by the regional supervisor with concurrence from the Directors Office. Regionally the program managers will be included in a review process to aid the Regional Supervisor in his recommendations.

Mike thanked the CAC for their dedication, insight and willingness to respectfully have some hard conversations.

#### **7:15 p.m. – Public comment, items not on agenda**

##### **Ron Normandeau:**

- Involved with Recreational Aviation Foundation that maintains backcountry air strips
- Money from large aviation companies.
- The group requires open access to recreational activities when working on projects
- Worked with UM grad student: backcountry air traffic effects on wildlife
- Has interest in this group and the work that FWP does.

##### **Brett Enright and Ty Stubblefield:**

- interest in hearing more about black bears and the impacts of hunting on conflicts
- FWP suggestion to host a public meeting to discuss this topic, as it had frequently come up this year. Would need to be after a regional wildlife manager is hired
  - This public meeting could replicate an internal black bear meeting that was held with enforcement and wildlife after the wildlife attack on a human a couple of years ago. Very similar thoughts about conflicts today were shared. The result of those conversations was the permit bear hunt.

- Brett and Ty indicated the quota level is not matching what hunters are seeing on the ground. Bear season is shorter as the female sub quotas fill quickly and there is more bear conflict in the area. Hunters are confused why black bear season is shorter and there are so many conflicts and bears in the area. FWP has killed more bears than hunters did for spring season. Suggestion to improve education for people to better understand what a female vs male black bear looks like. increase in bear hunters is important to consider.

**7:45 p.m. – Adjourn**