

Upper Missouri River Citizens Advisory Committee (UMR CAC)
Annual Winter Meeting – MT Wild Auditorium
10:00AM on 12/19/2023

Participants

UMR CAC Members: Mike Agee, Bart Bratlien, Dale Gilbert, Lance Kresge. Pete Cardinal not present.

FWP: Eileen Ryce, Eric Roberts, Mike Duncan, Jason Mullen, Adam Strainer, Troy Humphrey, Chris Hurley

Note: Pete Cardinal provided input post meeting via email.

Meeting Introduction

Eric Roberts – Update on Statewide Fisheries Management Plan, current and future fishing regulation processes, and challenge to simplify regulations in the future.

Adam Strainer – Introduction, meeting agenda, CAC role, meeting goals and action items.

1. Participants approved meeting agenda.
2. Offered Travel Expense Vouchers pertinent non-FWP employee participants.
3. Briefly described CAC framework. Provided outline of the meeting, specifically the format for discussion for considered management actions.

UMR CAC Member Updates/Reports

Bratlien – Reported a good year for selling fishing tackle in Helena, especially Kokanee gear. Most customers were happy with their angling experiences throughout the plan area. Holter was incredible for fishing for all species, especially Kokanee.

Agee – Reported great fishing throughout the plan area, especially from Hauser Dam to Upper Holter Reservoir. Continues to see a maintained increase in anglers in the plan area. Interested in learning more about Beaver Creek restoration project effects on the fishery.

Gilbert – Reached out to constituents for feedback about angling experiences in 2022 and didn't hear any significant input. Holter – heard positive reports from anglers related to most species. Canyon Ferry – heard reports about anglers continuing to see improvements in the fishery; moreover, he was impressed with what he observed and what he heard from anglers participating in the Walleye Festival tournament. "Bottom line, things look pretty good."

Kresge – No complaints from angling experiences on waterbodies within the plan area. Canyon Ferry continues to improve and "medium sized fish" (22"-25") were present in 2023.

Cardinal – (via e-mail; post meeting) "Buzz I heard here was all about the return of the Kokanee and the amount and size of perch in Holter. It's a no brainer this is the best improvement in all the fisheries to date and the best angler satisfaction to date about the status of the reservoirs."

Waterbody Updates

Duncan – Presented 2023 data related to plan goals for the **Missouri River from Toston Dam to Canyon Ferry Reservoir** and updates on Deep Creek trapping, water projects, and the brown trout telemetry project.

Presentation discussion - CAC members interested in water leasing and how more water is influencing the waterbody section. Additionally, CAC members were interested in how to keep more water in the Missouri River.

Strainer – Presented 2023 data related to plan goals for the **Missouri River from Hauser Dam to Holter Reservoir**.

Presentation discussion – CAC members interested in positive results observed in Beaver Creek, post restoration, and how angling pressure remains high. Also interest in the Kokanee spawning experiment.

Humphrey – Presented 2023 data related to plan goals for **Canyon Ferry Reservoir**.

Presentation discussion – Discussed walleye, walleye diet and rainbow plant increases.

Lunch

Strainer – Presented 2023 data related to plan goals for **Hauser Reservoir**.

Presentation discussion – Discussed sustained high levels yellow perch, northern pike and walleye abundance. CAC members interested in kokanee plant success and plant effects downstream (Holter).

Strainer – Presented 2023 data related to plan goals for **Holter Reservoir**.

Presentation discussion – Discussed incredible fishing for all species. Outlook looks very good for the fishery.

FWP Fisheries HQ Updates – Ryce

Updated the CAC on the following topics:

1. Fishing Regs – Last year of 1-year regulation booklet (2024). Moving forward, regulation booklets will span 2-year periods. Scoping for '25/ '26 booklet will begin in summer 2024. Multiple opportunities to comment. FWP would like to add potential UMRRFMP reg changes to the upcoming scoping process. That said, necessary reg changes that need to occur, per the UMRRFMP, can and will still occur as needed “off cycle”.
2. Waterbody specific plans will no longer go to the commission for approval.
3. Commission process changes = New format sends draft out for comment and final decision at same time.

4. FWP staff will now only be considering management changes based entirely on science. Commission continues to sort out non-science related input on potential changes. Change has been positive thus far.

Group Discussion: Management Strategies - Maintain Status Quo or Consider Management Actions?

Missouri River – Toston Dam to Canyon Ferry Reservoir

FWP - Consider changing the current walleye regulation (10 daily only 1 over 15”) to 5 daily and 10 in possession (Central District Standard).

FWP Rationale – Based on the current Toston section walleye population size structure, the current regulation is not biologically warranted, does not benefit trout management and is too restrictive for harvest-oriented anglers. Additionally, simplifying the regulation to the Central Fishing District Standard for walleye in the section removes an unnecessary exemption in the regulation booklet. Additionally, no action was taken by the Commission when the same regulation was proposed in 2022; therefore, the sitting R3 Commissioner asked that the proposal come back to the Commission for consideration. Plan is to scope the considered reg change alongside scoping efforts for the '24-'25 regulation change process (see above).

CAC Discussion: Kresge and Gilbert stated that most current information indicates that the river and reservoir walleye population is the same, so the same regulation should continue to be in place in both Canyon Ferry and the Toston section. Gilbert asked what additional information is available to suggest walleye are affecting trout in the river; otherwise, he doesn't support the proposed regulation change. Kresge questioned what information has changed since the current plan was adopted in 2020 and reminded the group of strong opposition, by walleye advocates, to any walleye regulation different from Canyon Ferry. Gilbert and Kresge also suggested enforcement issues will arise with proposed regulation boundary and increasing harvest on larger fish in the river will negatively affect the Canyon Ferry walleye population. Gilbert and Kresge adamantly opposed the considered regulation change. Bratlien stated that a special walleye regulation is not warranted in the plan section. Agee stated that he was concerned that supporting the considered reg change would equate to trout vs. walleye. He was not comfortable taking a stance. Cardinal supports FWP's considered change.

CAC – 1 CAC Members (Bratlien) support the proposal, 2 CAC Members (Gilbert and Kresge) oppose the proposal, 1 CAC Member (Agee) was undecided, and 1 CAC Member was not present.

Missouri River – Hauser Dam to Holter Reservoir

FWP –Status Quo

CAC – Unanimous CAC member support of FWP's recommendation.

Canyon Ferry Reservoir

FWP –Status Quo

CAC – Unanimous CAC member support of FWP's recommendation.

Hauser Reservoir

FWP –Status Quo

CAC – Unanimous CAC member support of FWP’s recommendation.

Holter Reservoir

FWP – Status Quo

CAC – 4 CAC members support FWP’s recommendation; 1 CAC member (Cardinal) does not support status quo for yellow perch management.

Discussion: Gilbert stated he thought Cardinal would be interested in a potential yellow perch regulation change based on the sustained high abundance levels in Holter Reservoir; however, Cardinal was not present. Post meeting, via email, Cardinal was concerned about a lack of responsiveness by FWP and the CAC by not liberalizing the perch limits on Holter. Would like to see an increase based on the current population trend.

UMR CAC Member Reappointment

UMR CAC members present at the meeting (Agee, Bartlien, Gilbert, and Kresge) all confirmed they would like to be reappointed. Cardinal confirmed he would like to be reappointed post meeting via email. These members are all reappointed for 2024.

Meeting Adjourned at approximately 3PM.