

Game Management Advisory Council

7 March 2015

WCA Boardroom
1301 N. Dolarway Road
Ellensburg, WA 98926

Meeting Notes

Members in Attendance: Rob McCoy, BJ Thorniley, Dave Duncan, Dean Holecek, James Horan, Jim Stephenson, John Magart, Lee Davis, Mark Pidgeon, Randy Mesenbrink, Shawn McCully, Terry Mansfield, Rusty Hunt, Ren Sarns, Jerry Barron, Al Martz, Jake Weise, Darrell Moore, Paul Schneider

WDFW Staff: Nate Pamplin, Mick Cope, Jerry Nelson, Donny Martorello, Matthew Trendera

Welcome and Introductions: Meeting called to order at 10:00. Mick Cope was introduced as Game Division Manager and gave a brief history of his work experience.

Approval of the August 16, 2014 Minutes: Correction of name spelling. Rob McCoy with motion to approve with amendments. Minutes approved unanimously with amendments.

Approval of the December 6, 2014 Minutes: Correction of name spelling, update language to reflect Jerry and Rob worked on language for hair-loss in black tails, Mark Pidgeon motion to approve with amendments. Minutes approved unanimously with amendments.

Game Division 2015 – Who’s who and what are they doing now: Mick gave an overview of the Game Division to update status. Jerry Nelson is Deer/Elk Section Manager. Brian Calkins is Upland Bird, Furbearers/Trapping, and Private Lands Section Manager and works with access programs. Don Kraege is Waterfowl Section Manager. Donny Martorello is Carnivore Section Manager (Bear, Cougar, Wolf). Stephanie Simek is Conflict Management Section Manager, dealing with deer/elk conflict management, as well as wolf conflicts. Richard Harris is goat/sheep/moose/pronghorn Section Manager. Dave Ware is now the WDFW Wolf Policy Lead, reporting directly to Nate Pamplin. Dave works with Wolf Advisory Group, media relations, cross-state coordination, and legislative relations.

Sage Grouse CCAA

Cynthia Wilkerson could not make it, but Nate gave an overview of the federal sage grouse listing proposal and the development of the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA). A Sage Grouse Task Force was formed in response to possible listing to see what could be accomplished throughout the states such that conservation of grouse could be achieved without the need for Federal ESA protection. WDFW has been actively participating in the Sage Grouse Task Force. The CCAA is a voluntary agreement where landowners commit to approved conservation measures and if sage grouse are listed, landowners will not be required to do more. This type of work, in addition to the other sage grouse actions, may prevent federal listing and if it is listed, areas covered by a CCAA may avoid critical habitat designations. The CCAA

provides some operational certainty as well. Nate clarified that the CCAA can be used by non-federal landowners in WA, and that WDFW is trying to work with various groups to determine impacts on landowners, hunting groups, and others. Nate noted that WDFW is aiming for a combination of good conservation practices that landowners can embrace, adequate conservation value, and something that the USFWS will support.

Comment: Terry Mansfield – WDFW sits on the Sage Grouse Initiative (SGI) board, and has done an outstanding job trying to connect and deliver sage grouse conservation messages, as well as delivering private lands conservation services. Sage grouse are an important barometer of where we are with a whole host of other wildlife that depends on sage-steppe habitat. A SGI web site exists (link through the Intermountain West Joint Venture website). It is a good source of information - overviews science component and how various agencies are working together. It is a great opportunity to learn and put the listing issue in context.

Comment: Dave Duncan – Cattlemen do not necessarily agree with proposed CCAA initiative. Dave agreed with Terry on SGI being a great source of information. USFWS wants good, basic conservation, and is not as regulatory as people think. Meetings he has attended show that the recreational public knows very little about what is happening. Look at State sage grouse conservation plan, which takes in a lot of the state - historic habitat takes about 40% of land in state. That document mentions reintroduction to all of these areas. Concern that the CCAA, is being fast tracked with no public input. Trying to be collaborative, but an awful lot of ground needs to be covered before Cattlemen are happy with this process. Concern that lands purchased with “Recreational dollars” could end up with reintroductions and could be locked up for six months (February through July) at a time. Not sure that this process is correct.

Members discussed the potential for legal challenge but saw wisdom in having a state plan in place for WA. Members discussed the effect predators may have on grouse and the role of fire. It was noted that the “large scale” threat to grouse is habitat loss, but that in small populations, predators can depress populations. Members commented that it is important for GMAC and hunting community to stay abreast of non-game issues for inadvertent impacts to hunting and recreation opportunity. Nate committed to revising the CCAA and circulating it to the GMAC for review and comment. Further public comment opportunities on the CCAA will occur through NEPA review.

Grizzly Bear EIS

Nate provided an update on grizzly bears in Washington. About 15 years ago, a state statute was formed that said grizzly bears cannot be translocated into the state. The USFWS and National Park Service are developing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to explore actions that can be conducted to recover grizzly bears in the North Cascades. Public meetings by the two federal agencies are being held at this time. Because WDFW needs to be involved per the statute, WDFW has agreed to be a cooperating agency on the EIS. WDFW has expressed concerns to both agencies putting this forward, not only in relation to state statute, but also due to timing with wolf recovery and how carnivore management is a hot topic in WA State.

Elk Hoof Disease Update

Jerry Nelson provided an update and overview of WDFW efforts related to elk hoof disease. Jerry clarified that the agency is confident, based on several independent tests, that the disease is caused by a bacteria. Currently, there are three primary agency efforts related to understanding the disease.

- A survival study that will investigate the survival and productivity between affected and unaffected elk. This effort utilizes elk equipped with GPS collars. In February, staff captured 78 elk (breeding age cows) – 20 control animals and 58 animals that were affected. All of these animals are within 5 GMUs in the St. Helens herd.
- An effort to use volunteers to help the agency identify the distribution and prevalence affected elk.
- Encourage the public to continue to report their sightings on the WDFW hoof disease website.

The last two efforts are important to help WDFW to understand distribution on the landscape and how that changes over time. Currently, we believe it is as far north as Highway 8/12 and east toward Randle along Highway 12

Website Accessibility

Mick provided an update on WDFW efforts to update their website to accommodate vision-impaired customers. The agency is taking steps to prioritize changes that make an impact to improve the website for those individuals.

Hunter Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation Committee

Mick and Jake Weise provided an update from the committee meetings held in recent months and the group discussed why hunter recruitment is an issue. The committee is made up of different stakeholders from the GMAC, Hunter Education Instructor Advisory Committee, and some unique demographics (female hunters, young female hunters). The goal is to get interest back in the sport - data shows numbers slowly going down. There are 160 known organizations working on this recruitment/re-engagement strategy across the country. Research shows that youth must be engaged early (before 16) and women are fastest growing subset. The challenge will be to identify the goals and objectives for WA, then discuss the actions that could help us reach them. Getting feedback from GMAC would be good to have.

Additional discussion was had regarding Michigan and Colorado approaches to public education and outreach on the value of hunting and hunting-related recreation, both economics and wildlife management.

2015-2017 Three Year Package Discussion

The group discussed the proposed 3-year package rule changes by reviewing the major changes proposed for each agenda item in the draft Commission meeting agenda.

Game Reserves and Other Migratory Bird: Many of the changes involve game reserves that were not functioning effectively while others were changed slightly to improve function. Minor changes to non-toxic shot are also included.

Equipment Requirements and GMU Boundaries: Two main equipment issues.

- Allowing crossbows in general modern firearm seasons.
- Allowing mechanical broadheads.

WA State Bowhunters: 6-3 in favor of broadheads. WA State Archery Association approves mechanical broadheads as well. Pope and Young does not exclude their use. Traditional archers do not support. General consensus - We don't want to overly regulatory if we don't have to.

Some discussion related to hunters with disabilities.

GMU boundary change in Region 5. A significant portion of Margaret Unit was proposed to move to LooWit, but an adjustment is being proposed such that the land will remain a part of Margaret. Special Elk Area is now being added to Margaret.

Importation of dead wildlife – confusion with sheep classification – “thin-horned” sheep from out of state – reporting requirement? This was a question that needed an answer post meeting – Post-meeting Answer: Thin-horned sheep do not need to be reported. The point of reporting is to keep a handle on commercializing Washington's wildlife.

Hunter Orange, Multi-Season: This WAC provides agency ability to sell multi-season tags that were not purchased by raffle winners. They will be sold over the counter on first-come, first-served basis. Note – WDFW is still open to implementation ideas. Question: Will points be lost if the over-the-counter tag is purchased? Answer: If you apply to the drawing, you will lose points.

Landowner/Hunting Permits: Changes: Addition of Bennett Lumber LHP. Bennett will open up property to general season through the WDFW reservation system. Removing 4-0, as most of it is public now.

Small Game Hunting and Trapping:

- Adding Eurasian Collared Dove to predatory birds. Comment: Ravens have increased considerably, are predatory on sage grouse. Answer: Ravens are part of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and so cannot be added.
- Keep 4 grouse bag limit, but change to 3 of one species. This is another step to help hunters identify different sub-species of grouse. Relaxing rules on night hunting for raccoons during deer and elk seasons. This is attempt to expand opportunity. Disagreement in WAC 242 and WAC 288. Intent was to allow night-hunting for bobcat and raccoon, but language doesn't agree. There still may be a concern about spotlighting deer and elk during November and December months. Mick will email update to group after looked at more closely.
Post-meeting Update: The rule expands night hunting for bobcat and raccoon by eliminating the restriction in the month of September AND by limiting the restriction to be in play only during modern firearm deer and elk GENERAL seasons (not permit seasons). These changes significantly increase the number of days night hunting is allowed, but retains the regulation during modern firearm general seasons.

Mountain Goat, Bighorn Sheep, and Moose:

Sheep seasons: The group discussed sheep permit hunts with specific questions surrounding the Disabled Hunter/Hunt Coordinator hunt? The fact that WDFW staff will be with the hunter was explained. The proposal may be to get some of the older, ear-tagged animals out of the herd.

The group discussed the change that gives WDFW more control of permit hunt numbers so there is more flexibility for staff to maximize hunting. The director would get the authority to make the call on how many tags will be available on these hunts.

Sheep Horns - WAC 232-12-284 – This rule clarifies the definition of sheep horn and clarifies when a horn could be permitted for sale (going toward conservation). Does not clarify whether horns had to be harvested in WA. This is tied to having to have a permit from WDFW to sell horns, no matter where they came from. The intent of these changes is to give better direction on when WDFW could give a permit. There was confusion as to what would be considered legal or illegal in these cases and a comment to make sure we are not creating criminals. Mick committed to getting back to the group with clarification on the intent of the rule and with a better summary of what the rule does:

Post meeting Update to the group: The intent of the rule is to 1) clarify the definition of what sheep horns are regulated; 2) clarify that someone who kills a sheep in WA must take it to a department representative to be pinned; 3) control commerce/poaching of big horn sheep by clarifying that a permit to sell bighorn sheep will be provided if they are being sold for conservation value. The rule does not address possession of sheep harvested/acquired prior to the rule – there is no change to the existing rule, which is silent on that topic. Currently, and into the future, a person who transfers sheep horns needs to notify WDFW.

Moose: the group discussed proposed moose season changes. Primary interest was in NE WA where moose areas are proposed to be split into smaller units and permits increased to provide increased opportunity. One member thought we should keep the two-month season and not split into two one-month seasons because it didn't provide more opportunity. Discussion covered additional opportunity was present in both increased permits and increased odds of drawing.

Bear and Cougar: Donny Martorello presented bear and cougar season changes. The group discussed increased spring bear in NE WA - recommending doubling spring bear permits in those areas; recommending adding spring bear hunt at Long Beach to help address high bear populations and conflict issues; recommending removing GMU 501 because Weyerhaeuser opting out of spring bear hunting. All these spring bear changes would reflect in 2016 seasons.

There was discussion on western WA spring hunts and how they address tree damage or other conflicts. In some cases, hunters will need to do their homework on access for permit hunts on private lands.

The group discussed the cougar recommendation to add one month to the end of the season (April) beginning in 2016. There were no recommended changes to harvest guidelines, so certain areas can close from Jan. 1, after they have been assessed and harvest numbers have been considered. Longer season will give more opportunity, but harvest numbers can still be controlled. There was additional discussion on predators and that WDFW is planning to begin working on predator prey issues as outlined in the Game Management Plan.

Deer and Elk Regulations

Baiting for deer and elk hunting: The baiting issue was the number one issue this cycle, as far as passion, comments, and recommendations. We had public meetings, website comments, a random telephone survey (questions asked to licensed deer and elk hunters), comments once hunting seasons were posted. Another step is this meeting, followed by presentation during March commission meeting. Website comments showed majority of folks wanted to keep baiting the same. Random telephone survey, small majority looked for restriction on baiting (small majority for deer hunters, much larger majority for elk hunters). Web-based comments on hunting season proposals showed a vast majority of people did not want any restriction on baiting.

The group had a good discussion on the four options: Status quo, outright ban, restriction on volume, and restriction on volume with exceptions for youth/senior/disabled as well as private landowner options. Ken Harris submitted a lengthy letter stating his position regarding baiting. Members in attendance acknowledged his letter in the discussion. Issues surrounding disease, opportunity, recruitment, effectiveness, and hunting success were all discussed in detail. It was noted that this is a social issue and that it is difficult to regulate ethics. The group did not support restricting opportunities without a biological basis, especially if there are serious problems with enforcing them as there seems to be here.

The GMAC members decided that they would take a stand and ask that WDFW carry their message to the Commission. There was a motion that the GMAC recommend to the Department and Commission that we maintain status quo. Motion made by Shawn McCully. Seconded by John Magart.

MOTION LANGUAGE as read by Mick Cope: In the absence of WDFW finding a biological reason to make a recommendation, GMAC is recommending that the Commission does not adopt changes to existing deer and elk baiting rules for the following reasons:

- *Effects on archer success rates - Allocation issues*
- *Impacts to hunter retention/recruitment*
- *Enforceability*
- *Effects on selectivity*

Shawn McCully amends the motion to include the words stated by Mick Cope. Seconded by John Magart. VOTE: 17 Yea, 0 Nay, 1 Abstained

Timing of Early Archery Elk Season

The group briefly discussed the recommendation to open early archery elk on Saturday after Labor Day, running for 13 days. There had been significant discussion at prior GMAC meetings.

Trying to put more Early Muzzleloader Elk GMUs Open

The group discussed the proposal to add a substantial number of new GMUs for muzzleloader elk hunting across the state. No concerns were raised.

Master Hunter 3911 Hunt

The group discussed the changes to the footnote seen in the general season elk rule that attempts to clarify what is already going on with Elk Area 3911. These changes had been discussed with the Master Hunter Advisory Group and they were supportive.

GMU 117 and 121 4 Point

The group discussed the fact that the proposed deer general season in GMUs 117 and 121 includes two options for the Commission to consider - Retain 4 point, or go back to any buck. Al Martz requested harvest data from 2014, which will be sent when available. Al also recommended that some antlerless opportunity for youth in these GMUs for any buck, but to retain the 4-point regulation. WDFW will be evaluating 4 years of harvest and hunting data and are waiting to make a recommendation based on what they find after reviewing with Regional and headquarters staff.

More Antlerless White Tail Deer Opportunity

The group discussed the recommendation to add more antlerless opportunity via special permit and some general season muzzleloader opportunities. Bobbie was concerned with youth/disabled/senior with any deer throughout the season in the “north half”. She recommended maintaining shorter season for modern firearm for those three groups. The rationale was that the herd is not ready for that amount of pressure.

Adding Days to Modern Firearm Mule Deer Season

The group discussed the proposal to add two days to mule deer season. Hunters want more/better time to hunt mule deer, and this proposal is designed to offer a more time without impacting populations much.

Changing Margaret Unit to General Season from Special Permit Season

The group discussed creation of a new elk area (Norway Pass) and how boundary adjustments will address challenges with access on the St. Helens Monument and private forest land access challenges in large majority of the Margaret GMU. The New Elk Area will be in Margaret but be permit only.

General Comment on Deer and Elk:

Related to gaps between deer season and elk season. Why does the season fluctuate so badly in the next three years, especially in 2017? Hunters do not want to lose five days of deer/elk hunting in 2017. Answer: Jerry will check back with Region 1 staff to check and reevaluate. Commission wanted to start seasons on Saturdays for weekend hunters. Comment: Giving back to weekday hunters wouldn't take those weekend hunts away.

Donny Martorello – Wolf Population Update

Donny Martorello provided the group with an update on the status of wolves in WA. Annual surveys happen once per year (minimum packs, breeding pairs, etc.) Three basic metrics: confirmed packs, number of wolves, successful breeding pairs. In 2014, WA had 16 packs including 4 new ones and loss of one (Ruby Creek was dropped off as one member was hit by a car and one member was sent to Wolf Haven International due to habituation).

New packs: Tucannon Pack now spending majority of time in Washington, not OR. Goodman Meadows Pack, Profanity Peak Pack, and Whitestone Pack are the other new ones.

Thirteen of 16 packs are in the eastern recovery area and 3 in the northern cascades area. Reports in other areas, but have not been able to confirm yet. There is a minimum count of 68 wolves, with five successful breeding pairs. There was a 31% increase in the minimum population, and there were 10 wolf mortalities – which is not unusual. We are below Northern Rocky Mountains in proportion of population removed annually as well as depredations.

Legislative Update

Nate gave an overview of the action in the legislature at this time. Legislature right now is in long session. Cutoff for bills coming out of chamber of origin is March 11. WDFW has worked on the budget since last spring and submitted budget in September. Governor came out with a budget in December. With Wildlife Program, the only general fund reduction was directed at Payment in Lieu of Taxes. From an agency perspective – some cuts are made in hatchery production and enforcement, and there are some fund swaps to achieve general fund savings.

There were 8 bills in the house and 4 in the senate related to wolves. Two bills direct the Department to amend the plan; WDFW has testified in support of this bill. The Agency fee bill will have modest increases to fish licenses and a couple adjustments that affect hunters include creation of stand-alone damage and Master Hunter licenses and increases flexibility for commission to reduce prices or to bundle licenses at a discount price. Mick Cope reviewed the Game Division bills currently in legislature. There are about 14 bills that Game Division is still tracking after the first cutoff date out of committee.

Next GMAC - June 6, 2015

Potential Agenda Topics

- Dedicated Accounts – budgets and projects
- Urban Interface Cougar Project from Brian Kertson
- Wolf Update
- Legislative Update
- Sage Grouse CCAA Update
- 2015-17 Three Year Package Update
- Update on Allocation Committees
- Wildlife Conflict Rules (Deer, Elk, Livestock)
- Nominations

Adjourn: 4:45 pm