

Game Management Advisory Council Meeting Notes

June 6, 2015

WCA Boardroom
1301 N. Dolarway Road
Ellensburg, WA 98926

Members in Attendance: Rob McCoy, Dave Duncan, Al Martz, Terry Mansfield, Kevin Frankeberger, James Horan, Jerry Barron, John Magart, Warren Gimlin, Lee Davis, Gregg Rafundo, Bobbie Thorniley, Jim Stephenson, Darrell Moore, Ren Sarns, Jake Weise, Art Meikel, Becky Frankeberger, Jan Patrico, Rusty Hunt, Randy Mesenbrink, Mark Pidgeon, Commissioner Jay Kehne, Matt Marsh (Public)

WDFW Staff: Mick Cope, Dave Ware, Brian Kertson

Welcome/Introduction/Approval of Meeting Notes: Mick Cope introduced Commissioner Jay Kehne, and introductions were presented all around. Meeting notes from the March meeting were discussed. Ken Harris' letter on baiting was acknowledged in the meeting notes. The transfer of sheep horns was discussed and some language was added to the meeting notes. Motion to approve minutes filed and seconded, and minutes approved.

The West Cascades Cougar Project: Brian Kertson presented the cougar research that he has been overseeing, going over the details with a PowerPoint presentation. The world is increasingly urban, meaning humans can have more and more of an impact on wildlife, including carnivores like cougars. Washington state personifies the challenges of this situation. Washington is one of only four states that has a full slate of carnivores. There is also tremendous human population growth, and it continues to grow. This translates to habitat loss, leading to increased proximity and overlap. We have quite a few information needs.

The management of the cougar species is now transitioning to incorporate human presence landscapes. The events we focus on now are: cougar sightings, cougar depredations, cougar attacks on people. Brian's research focused on how much time cougars are spending around people. Young animals are three times as likely to use residential areas. Dense residential areas are less likely to have interactions, due to the creation of a "hard edge" of suitable and unsuitable habitat.

The perception of conflict exceeds the threat of conflict, though conflicts do occur. Educating the public so they know about the animals and have a good scientific approach that contributes to reducing the risk of conflict is essential.

Cougar population is much older in Washington now than it was from 2003-2008. Collars are not put on young. Instead, cameras are setup on active kills and monitored for kitten survival. If immigration is higher than emigration, cougars are being pushed out, while if emigration is higher than immigration, the issue becomes spatial and means cougars are just leaving for other areas. Thirty-eight cougars have been captured so far during the study. Survival rates are much

higher than we have measured in Washington before. Average survival rates are typically much lower.

Project is still in the early stages, but Brian is comfortable saying the population is older, there is a stable social structure, and the population is growing. It is very consistent with a lightly-hunted population. Brian is confident that he is getting the data he needs for this study. He hopes there are applications statewide with this study.

Question: Deer urbanization is on the rise. Is that a factor?

Answer: It is a very important factor. That may be the most successful avenue for reducing cougar risk, managing deer and elk populations.

Question: Would we be better off with cougar GMUs?

Answer: We would have liked to have seen a more localized management scale, as one of the drives of the 3-year package is to increase harvest opportunity. Whether that would affect urban interactions, we just don't know yet.

Question: How do you shoo the mom away when handling kittens?

Answer: Generally we try to go when mom is not there. Usually we wait for her to go off and make a kill. If she is there, we make a lot of noise as we come in and they tend to run off. It depends on the personality of the cougar.

Question: Is there other data that is indicative of lightly hunted areas?

Answer: It's simply the number of cougar mortalities that stem from hunting and other causes.

Question: Does that relate to how heavily hunted deer and elk are in those areas?

Answer: The GMU where the study is taking place is actually one of the most heavily hunted areas in regards to deer.

Question: Given the two mortality data-sets, what is changing in that group?

Answer: Previously, feline leukemia made a huge impact on the cougar population. We haven't seen any disease or vehicle collisions so far in this new study.

Question: Is Washington the only state doing this study?

Answer: Colorado is also doing some work. A lot of the work comes out of California. The hard part there is that California is not where Washington wants to be. We are hoping our landscape does not turn into what California has down the road.

3-year Package Update: Mick Cope went over a PowerPoint presentation on the changes made to the upcoming hunting seasons. He discussed major changes, including added hunting opportunities and equipment adjustments. There was a Commission amendment to increase cougar harvest in cougar areas that also have wolf packs.

Question: What was the rationale?

Answer: The goal was to increase social tolerance of predators in general in areas where there is increased presence on the landscape.

More work needed on baiting, which remains unchanged for the 2015, but staff was asked to do more work and bring the issue back to the Commission in 2016.

Commissioner Kehne: What amounted to that decision was the right thing to do at the time was to leave it alone, as there was not enough data to change anything. I do think, after so many public comments, that there is a lot of variety on the issue. Baiting is a geographic issue that hasn't been researched enough. I think it can create problems in certain areas, but other areas it cannot. I feel very strongly that we need to relook at this. We want a scientific approach, and it still may not change, but we should look at it again.

Lessons Learned/Improvements: Mick asked the group for ways we can improve our process as we move forward. Mick mentioned some issues, including the ways public comments are conducted, as well as public meetings.

Lee: There are a lot of opportunities available, but the issue comes with the way the surveys are written sometimes. Survey questions are brought out without saying where the department is going to go with the data. This is for earlier surveys, where options are not listed.

Al: The structure of public meetings could be adjusted. Since the breaking up into small groups happened, more and more people stopped coming. With the small groups, not everyone can get all the comments, which turns a lot of people off.

Mick: We have been doing a kind of open house lately, which is different from the townhall/small groups meetings. At the end, there is time for entire meeting comments. Would that be something better?

Al: That's an improvement, for sure. I think it's much better than what it was, but that time at the end definitely needs to be there so each person can get some time and hear everything. Also, department staff should have a notepad or something to write those comments down.

Comment: Most of these agency meetings have become an issue-defusing tool rather than an information collecting tool. Some general opinions regarding the meetings seem to think that the department will just present their way and try to convince people.

Mick: Certainly my goal with these meetings is to hear from everyone and look at the issues and alternatives. We should probably think about writing at the time.

Comment: You absolutely need to maintain transparency. A lot of times the public will come to these meetings and comment and then the regulations come out with things that were not there to comment on at those meetings.

Mick: I am definitely behind a transparent government and making sure there is open communication between the agency and the public.

Comment: The public comments online can come from anywhere, not necessarily the hunting public. Most of the people at the public meetings are people who are hunters. I feel like the comments received at the public meetings should hold a little more weight than the ones received online.

Dave Ware: The online surveys are always evolving, and we try to include questions that narrow those comments down and so we know who is commenting. At this time, about 95% of the comments we receive are from the hunting public.

Comment: For GMAC involvement, if we could have a calendar with milestones for these packages and plans, it would really help with setting meetings and sub-committees. Having all of those dates, and knowing what is being covered at what timeframe, would really help how we approach this as a group.

Mick: We will certainly make a concerted effort to do that. We also did a debrief with the Game Division about lessons learned throughout the last year in regards to packages and plans and we will continue to work on streamlining that process.

Comment: I like the open house style, as you can talk directly to Fish & Wildlife in smaller groups, and those are the people you want to convince and discuss with.

Comment: There are a quarter million licensed hunters out there, and there are six million in the total state population. What is the pressure you feel from those other six million people? Do they have any influence?

Mick: I don't feel like we're getting a lot of pressure from the total population, though there are definitely organized groups who are more vocal. We certainly need to remain as open as we can, but it is also important to know who the comments are coming from.

Comment: This came up during the wolf issue, when 2,000 comments came from environmental groups and not a whole lot came from the hunting community.

Bobbie: Public meetings are critical, because believe it or not, there are huge numbers of hunters and fishermen who are not able to use the online services. They need to at least have that opportunity.

Rob: Tribal influence on wildlife management in Washington is largely overblown. The one exception to that is the upper Skagit. Many tribes can even feel disenfranchised when they submit public comments on all of these packages and plans.

Gregg: Perhaps WDFW could get that more out there, letting everyone know they weigh all of the comments they receive equally. That ties into the transparency issue.

Waterfowl: Mick went over the 2016 proposed waterfowl rules and the process for getting the new pamphlet out to the public. Waterfowl populations are doing very well, and the regulation package should fall on the liberal side again this season. Goose hunting could change in the future, as check stands may close. Overall it would give more Canada goose opportunities, but folks would have to be more careful in areas with duskies. The rest of the rules are mostly date changes.

Comment: I see a lot of issues that will come out of that dusky change. With the check stations closing, who is going to regulate and manage that?

Mick: We have that problem already, even though the check stations are there. We feel that we can be more effective by going out into the field and working on outreach in that way. It is difficult even now to eliminate those illegal behaviors, so we want to go out to those people in the field, rather than wait for them to come to us.

Question: Is the inclusion of one canvasback in the bag limit part of the population management or is that something else?

Mick: Yes that is an opportunity, rather than a mistake bird allowance.

ADA Website Update: Kevin gave an update on the progress of the ADA website. There were 30 million hits on the website last year. The website is now 5 years old. Smart phone access is not a rewarding experience. The website is inaccessible to a wide range of folks, including persons who are disabled and persons who cannot read the English language.

The governor's office will consider helping with the development of a new website. The website needs to be updated, as it is now five years old. We are on the way to get the website fixed, but it is not fixed yet.

Salvaging roadkill: Commissioner Kehne presented the topic of salvaging roadkill. Why can other states collect roadkill and Washington cannot? The process in other states has led to very few problems. This is something Washington can think to implement, and Mick is working with the Commission and internally with Enforcement to look at what options are available with moving forward.

Question: What is the downside to this?

Answer: One thing we need to think about is that this is not just an agency issue. This will involve the public, highway patrol, other agencies, and co-managers to make sure we are all in

the same place. Washington is very different from Montana in that the population is much larger, meaning it could be potentially unsafe to stop and pick up roadkill of the freeway.

Comment: Regulations could conflict with rules already existing. Potential conflict with tribes.

Commissioner: This would not be an expensive thing to set up either, as Montana has already said we could potentially assist us in the process of creating the website forms and permits.

Comment: Columbian white-tailed deer need to be considered as well. SW Washington has them and they are an endangered species. The endangered species aspect will need to be considered if the process goes forward.

Comment: Potential conflict with other agencies, including the Department of Health.

Sage Grouse CCAA: Dave Duncan gave an update on the CCAA status. The biggest issue with sage grouse is that most of the studies show that 85% of the eggs and chicks are being eaten by ravens. The CCAA side should fall into place as we go on. The original document, developed by the Wildlife Diversity Division, had to be thrown out. We are on the fourth or fifth 80-page document, but I think we should get there. The raven issue is serious, and the science is behind us, but the politics are not.

Legislative Update: Dave Ware gave a legislative update. Two bills are still alive in Congress, but they are focused on the budget at the moment, so we don't know if anything will come of them.

Dave Duncan: I have to leave early, but wanted to say for the Wolf Advisory Group, I think the facilitator is necessary if we want to make any progress with the group. We have a history of failure without the facilitator, and she should definitely stay on.

Baiting Rules – Sub-committee Development: Mick would like to have a sub-committee made up of some GMAC members who may be interested in participating on the baiting issue. Several members volunteered.

Volunteers: Lee Davis, Terry Mansfield, Bobbie Thorniley, Warren Gimlin, Rusty Hunt, Ren Sarns, and Jan Patrico

Lee: There is a bigger issue here in that if you look at hunter retention, the recent big drops coincided with the two biggest changes in the regulations. We will want to keep that in mind.

Rob: Those seven people don't seem like too many. I don't think we should exclude anyone who wants to volunteer in this case.

Mick gave an overview of the plan for the sub-committee, including meeting dates and processes. Current plan is also to include Region 2 Wildlife Manager Matt Monda.

Wildlife Conflict Rules: Mick presented the proposed Wildlife Conflict Rules to the group. Wildlife Program took the conflict section from Enforcement three years ago. Cities and urban areas are expanding in Washington, meaning wildlife conflicts are going to increase. Issues the department deals with include everything from beaver and deer/elk damage to predator depredations. There is a need to revise and propose rules to address the future of conflict management. We are trying to put staff in places where they are needed the most.

There will be an initial presentation to the Commission at the next Commission meeting. There will be no decision made until August, so there is still some time for us to collect comments online and in other areas to get public input.

Laws are different depending on the species involved. WDFW is mandated by law to compensate for deer and elk damage, but not timber damage, for example. WDFW is still charged with assisting owners with minimizing damage to commercial agriculture and timberlands. Help includes everything from regular hazing to damage permits that allow for hunting on the landowner's property. Wildlife Program continues to learn more about the extent of these damage claims and will continue to work with landowners to find solutions.

Question: Why a quota for damage permits?

Answer: It is the maximum amount of permit opportunities we can give out. The Commission approves the amount.

Question: If you max out the permits, and there is that one bull that keeps coming back, is the only option to then continue to compensate that landowner as the elk continues to cause damage.

Answer: There is also a department kill permit that can be issued, though we try to use those as sparingly as possible. It is more transparent to go through the public process and use the damage permits when we can. However, if we get into a pinch, we can address it.

Question: Where does funding come from for payment to landowners?

Answer: It's a variety. There is some federal funding from the tester program, there is the state wildlife fund money, there is some directly appropriated from the legislature, and there is some general fund money as well.

Question: How much do you end up paying out on average?

Answer: We are capped at \$10,000 per claim from the legislature. It hasn't been more than \$50,000 for a year yet. We've been working so hard at being proactive in these cases that we've been able to keep those costs down.

Hunt by Reservation is evolving as a tool as well in regards to damage permits and conflict management.

Comment: There should be a way to get these opportunities for youth, disabled, and 65 and over hunters.

Mick: One of the things that work so well with this program is that landowners have the right to choose who to give these permits to and can control who goes on their property.

Comment: Turkey is a conflict problem. Why are they not on the compensation list?

Mick: Legally we are not required to compensate for damage caused by turkeys.

Question: How is this mitigated?

Answer: Regional offices know which conflict specialists are in which areas, and calling them can get you in touch with those landowners who have received damage permits. Each region has master hunter hunts that are available as well. They are in the pamphlet.

Question: How does a normal hunter get involved in the process? Is it all word-of-mouth?

Answer: Yes, it is all word-of-mouth. Landowners do tend to keep it local, which works for them as well. In many cases, this isn't recreational; it is just for damage control. We want to use hunters to help, but it will probably never be that broad, permit process.

There used to be a lot of different permits, but for clarity and simplicity there are now two: damage prevention permits (Commission approved) and kill permits (agency approved).

Question: Are these damage permit harvests always donated to charity?

Answer: Not always. There are permits (agency approved) that have it written in that the animal will be for landowner and family consumption.

Question: Is an authorized hunter a wildlife control operator?

Answer: No, these are different. They are authorized by the department and go through a different protocol.

Question: How do the proposed rule changes coordinate with wolf issues?

Answer: Regardless if it's a wolf, cougar, or bear, someone from the department will have to verify the damage and what caused it. Right now we do not compensate for cougar or bear. There is compensation for wolves, in part because they are still a recovering species. The rules regarding carnivores are actually pretty similar.

Wildlife Control Operators will now require a mandatory trapper education exam, and possess 2 years of demonstrated experience. This will, hopefully, ensure the public gets good service from WCOs and also ensure that the WCOs are fully equipped to handle their trapping jobs.

Bobbie: Why change up the fur retention? As far as we can see, there is no reason to not follow the law as it is. Personal retention, be it for school, personal use, teaching your child to tan, should be allowed.

Mick: The thought of the law was to keep commerce out of the body-gripping trap market.

Bobbie: If it's for personal retention, then there will be no commerce.

Mick: Right, but it is unclear at this time how we may enforce that.

Bobbie: Also, this does not take into account the larger companies who will no longer be able to hire someone with the license and train them. The 2 years experience rule makes it difficult for those companies.

Mick: This is a similar discussion I had with WPA regarding mountain beaver and the training component.

Bobbie: If the person doesn't come with training, they need to be able to be trained. Don't start micromanaging and making it more complicated. Stick with the law in this case how it is.

Jake: Agree with Bobbie 100%. Perhaps you need a mentor program. Retention should not be in there at all.

General consensus is that the group agrees with Bobbie on the 2 year requirement being unnecessary and also on the retention.

Mick: I do think, as an agency, we need to be confident in the product we are offering, which is where this is coming from. We have WCOs who do not know what they are doing out there, meaning the department is offering a product that is not at the level of quality it needs to be.

Rob: The group further discussed the WCO issue. Most members want the law to stay as it is. Most members agree that a WCO needs to pass a trapping exam. There needs to be opportunity to get that 2 years of experience so you don't run into that catch-22 of needing experience to get experience. The other issue is, outside of trapping season, the retention for personal use of furs. Many group members added comments reflecting this argument.

Comment: Wording can be changed from checking trap every 24-hours to daily so we avoid confusion.

Policies and procedures will be discussed next weekend at Commission meeting.

Bobbie: When will any rewording on these rules be available?

Mick: Between now and the Commission meeting any adjustments should be made. We can get those out to group members. If not, there is still another month after the Commission meeting this weekend for public input and comment.

Wolf Population Update: As Donny was not present, Dave Ware presented the wolf population update. This presentation should be on the web soon. The department has been busy trying to get collars on wolves. Two collars were added to the Smackout pack a couple weeks ago. We added one to Profanity Peak recently as well. Currently we have 13 collars out in 9 packs.

One-on-one outreach is the most effective method of incorporating preventative tools. WDFW also developed a checklist, damage prevention cooperative agreements, and deterrence plans to help limit conflicts and prepare for interactions between livestock producers and wolves.

Depredations can occur with any pack, though there are packs that are more of a threat than others. Smaller packs tend to get into less trouble. Larger packs have more mouths to feed and are more of a threat.

Huckleberry and Teanaway seem to be producing still this year, despite both losing the breeding female last year.

Question: Do we know where the wolf that got hit on I-90 came from?

Dave Ware: We do not know where it came from. Because it was black, it is not likely that it came from Teanaway or Lookout.

Wolf Advisory Group had their first meeting last month. WDFW hired a facilitator, Francine Maddon, to help the group move forward. Because wolf management is so complicated and people are so passionate about it, Francine is hoping to deal with those deep-seeded issues that come up. She has received tremendous support from all sides so far.

Question: Will future meetings be officially open to the public?

Answer: Future meetings will be, yes. The first meeting was closed because of the team building nature of the meeting.

Question: How many representatives of the hunting community are on the group?

Answer: If you look around the room, out of the 18 members, about 13 hunt. The vast majority are hunters.

Also formed an Interagency Wolf Committee, consisting of tribes, representatives from Federal, Oregon, Idaho, and British Columbia agencies.

Data sharing is something that WDFW does with livestock producers. Producers can get the last 14 days worth of data if they are so inclined. Data sharing is not something WDFW normally does, but with wolves it was important. Oregon started it, and WDFW was encouraged to do it as well.

Question: Is Washington taking any action regarding the woodland caribou population, along with Idaho and British Columbia?

Answer: Not at this time.

Question: Isn't there also a cougar problem with the woodland caribou?

Answer: The most recent kill was a cougar kill. They did end up monitoring cougar depredation when the caribou numbers were much higher than they are now.

Ungulate Status in Areas with Wolves: Dave presented on the impact of wolves on ungulate populations. The Game Management Plan addressed this issue, and if wolves become a problem for ungulates, that can be addressed. At risk ungulate populations, like woodland caribou, can be managed accordingly if the situation calls for it.

Monitoring survival rates of young and female prey is key to detecting "at risk" ungulate populations.

Dave gave a review of the current wolf status in Washington, including minimum population counts, packs, and breeding pairs, as well as growth rates.

Buck harvest in core GMUs with wolves has remained relatively consistent, with certain years being affected by other factors as well. However, the last three years, as more wolf packs have been documented, harvest has gone up.

Compared with GMUs with no pack identified, the rates look similar. Most of the decline in some years probably had more to do with rough winters.

Question: Why do you monitor buck harvest if the number one indicator of populations is doe and female populations?

Answer: They are directly related.

With elk, wolves do not appear to be impacting bull harvest trends at this time.

Moose are similar in that wolves do not appear to be impacting moose harvest trends.

Comment: With the low number of moose permits, the harvest numbers should be similar no matter what.

Dave Ware: Rich also looked at other factors when coming to these conclusions, and Idaho and Montana, where they are seeing issues, harvests are going down because those population numbers are making it so permits are limited.

In other states, they are seeing disease affect moose populations. Ticks are a concern with this aspect as well.

Dave then went GMU by GMU in the northeastern part of Washington. The data seems to suggest no pattern in regards to wolves affecting buck harvest amounts.

Colockum elk herd has increased above objective, and WDFW is planning to reduce the population through hunting. Total harvest in the Colockum elk herd in the past few years has remained consistent.

At this point, WDFW has no measureable indication that wolves are having an impact on ungulate populations. If changes are detected, efforts will be employed. WDFW feels it is in a good position to monitor herds and deal with issues if they emerge.

Neighboring states have told WDFW that they did not see issues during the recovery phase. WDFW still thinks it is likely that wolves will have an effect on ungulate populations at some point as recovery and management goals move forward.

Ren: As wolves push herds out, won't hunter harvest go up?

Dave Ware: Just the opposite, actually. Wolves will actually push elk to higher elevation areas that are more difficult to hunt.

Question: How will we know if it's wolves and not other predators causing impacts?

Dave Ware: All of those things are potential issues.

Rob: Trying to look at the wolf as the primary culprit is not the right approach. You have to look at all of the predators involved. We have a new predator coming into an already diverse predator population. Is looking at it from a wolf-centric standpoint really all that helpful? Also, just looking at harvest trends is short-sighted. Look at trends that will ultimately decide the population.

Mick: That's true. We can put resources into multiple areas and not just one piece. And you are right that we will need to look at more than just the wolf.

John: The 4-point restriction in 117 and 121 was working and now that that is lifted, there are a lot of people concerned with that population. Predators and other factors, like a bad winter, could have a serious impact on those populations. If we ever hope to have a deer population again, we have to do something about the predation problem.

Al: The department is making a huge mistake with the white-tailed population, and it will impact the deer population negatively for years to come as harvest increases.

Mick: The department will go forward with pushing for funding for a predator-prey relation study.

September Meeting Date and Agenda Items: Mick pushed for an August 29 date for the next meeting for several reasons (avoiding hunting seasons, labor day weekend, and other factors). August 29 was approved for the next meeting.

Sub-committee dates: July 18 for the first meeting of the Baiting Sub-committee.

Agenda items for the upcoming meeting

- Presentation on PR funds and how they are used by the department
- Collective Parks/DNR/WDFW Website Rebound via OFM
- Effects of current drought on game management (brainstorm approach)
- Pulse of the Commission update (what topics are the Commission considering, etc.)
- Sage grouse CCAA brief
- Drone use when hunting
- Hoof disease update
- Wolf Update

Nominations and Vote for 2015-2016 GMAC Chair: Rob McCoy nominated and approved as chair. Jake Weise nominated as vice chair and approved.

Chair: Rob McCoy

Vice Chair: Jake Weise

Motion to give an accolade to Dave Ware.

Meeting Adjourned: 4:00 pm