

Game Management Advisory Council (GMAC) Meeting Notes

August 25, 2018

WCA Boardroom
1301 N Delray Road
Ellensburg, WA 98926

Members present: Rob McCoy, Dave Duncan, Jerry Barron, Art Meikel, James Stephenson, Dave Ingham, Al Martz, Jake Weise, Dave Hingham, John Magart, Al Martz, Warren Gimlin.

WDFW staff present: Anis Aoude, Rich Harris, Jarred Oyster.

Approval of notes: Anis led the review of notes from the June 2018 meeting. Motion to approve, seconded, approved.

Dave requested the flip charts from Donny's presentation from June to be attached to the meeting notes.

A discussion about the SEPA process ensued. Members of GMAC discussed how hunters' comments are weighted vs. non-hunters in hunting related matters.

They also discussed if we should even consider non-resident comments on SEPA.

There was a discussion about how some people are frustrated with wolves and ready to "take matters into their own hands".

The group also suggested conflict specialists should to take sightings of wolves into consideration in the wolf depredation reports.

The Group started a discussion about ungulate populations in wolf country. The group would like the department to have a better method for population and mortality estimation. This is a costly endeavor in a time when budgets are tight. They also discussed the harvest estimation procedure and how there could be some flaws in monitoring populations through harvest alone. They relayed their observations that ungulates in wolf country are more associated with towns and agriculture and less numerous in wild and public land. The group would like the department to cease doe harvest in that area until better information is available.

The next topic of discussion was the agency budget. Some members of GMAC believe that all people that use public lands should contribute in funding wildlife resources.

Rich Harris special species section manager gave 4 presentation updating the group on the status on moose, bighorn sheep, mountain goats, and pronghorn.

Moose: Population in Spokane County increasing from 2000-2012, the bad news is at this time the population is declining. He presented his study from two study areas, one with wolf packs (north) and another without wolf packs (south). The radio collared adults cows in both areas had 81% annual survival. In the north study area predation was a significant mortality factor while in the south human harvest was a significant mortality factor. Population declining in the north 16-22% and 4-7% in the south. Predation was a part of the story in the north, but in both study areas moose have very low body condition. This could indicate that moose populations had reached their carrying capacity and were due to decline. He indicated that poor foraging habitat exists during the summer for both study areas. Through observation they also found that calf survival was lower in north 33% when compared with the south 63%.

Bighorn Sheep: Hunting has remained stable for the last couple of years. There were more ewe permits in the Clemons area and more rams in Chelan Butte. A GMAC member asked if it would be more helpful to move ewes rather than killing them to supplement other populations and Rich indicated he has looked into this. Rich provided an update on Mt. Hull vegetation treatments which involved removing fuels and understory treatments. There was a discussion on pneumonia outbreaks. The outbreaks trigger all age die offs and the causal agent is carried by domestic animals. He provided information on test and cull, where certain animals are culled that are carriers. In South Dakota where they removed shedders lamb survival increased dramatically. In Asotin they implemented the same protocol and lamb survival was normal and the population increased. He discussed the Umtanum, Selah and Yakima Canyon Herds where the lamb survival is low and the large number of animals in that population makes test and cull very difficult due to the number of sub-herds. Possibly WDFW can reduce all the sub-herds to be able to implement test and cull. He discussed the Walla Walla sheep experimental herd which is an effort to build a disease free herd. He reported on the challenges that have hindered this effort and the difficulty of removing the pneumonia completely from the test population, but they are still trying.

Mt. Goat: Historically the populations were overhunted and declining. Since 2000, fewer permits and population now starting to increase. Hunting success has been around 90% and stated that Washington goat hunting the best of any jurisdiction. Discussion on the removal of goats from ONP (600-700 approx.). As many as possible will be captured and translocated (expect up to 350 goats will be captured) in 2018 and 2019. Goats will be moved to places that don't currently have a huntable population.

Pronghorn: Half are on the Yakima nation and half off. The population was 132 in 2015 and 121 in 2017 but the 2017 estimate wasn't very robust. In 2017 more were moved in from Wyoming. The Colville Tribe brought in 52 to their land in 2016 and then another 98 from Nevada in 2017. One hundred and six pronghorn in the Colville population were known to be alive as of July 18 with animals moving between Wenatchee and Colville. WDFW is only monitoring the situation at this time, not active work is planned. WDFW is monitoring them to see what happens when they are off reservation land. Comment from the GMAC indicated that the Cattlemen's and Ag interest are not on-board with having a state pronghorn population. There was discussion on how they are doing with coyote predation and Rich indicated they are not seeing a huge impact and they appear to be reproducing well. At some point we may need to

pull a committee together of landowners and hunters to develop how WDFW will manage pronghorn in the future.

After the presentations we discussed some articles that Al Martz asked the group to read. These articles dealt with predator management and antlerless harvest in other western states.

Article “When should hunters shoot does” sparked discussion on antlerless harvest in NE WA. It appears to some on GMAC that we shouldn’t harvest does when the population is down due to predation and disease issues. A discussion on the validity of using only hunter harvest data to determine antlerless harvest levels. We discussed the data you need by Dr. James Kroll to set antlerless seasons and there were differing views on his credentials. Dr. Kroll advocates that you harvest should be based on rate of growth or recruitment considering mortality. WDFW doesn’t have this type of data currently. An article from Utah in Muley Crazy Magazine found to many apex predators in the studies quoted. Comments from the GMAC included: that hunters believe they pay the bills from tag fees and should have more influence; that deer populations don’t seem to be getting better and that the failure to recognize it may be that younger biologists with WDFW don’t have the long term perspective to see the changes. In the NE there appears to be more deer on private land but not as many as in the past and; anecdotally ranchers are reporting that the high country is devoid of deer but are seeing more deer near civilization.

Anis indicated it was unfair to compare 20-40 years ago to now as the landscape has changed in regards to predation and habitat. Also that in WA we manage for quantity over quality, which is why we don’t have “trophy” animals. GMAC asked why not more predator harvest and Anis replied that other factors are at play and without good evidence that predation is a factor, those opposed to managing predators can hinder efforts by the Department to increase predator harvest, citing the cougar quota increases reversed by the governor. Comment from GMAC was that we can’t take more predators, can’t take wolves at all, but we still increase antlerless harvest. Some suggested that GMAC uses their voice as hunters to influence the Commission. A discussion was centered around trust and how there is a breakdown between WDFW and hunters/landowners. Potentially a lawsuit from sportsmen is needed.

Budget Update: Discussed the \$10 conservation fee for hunting and fishing licenses that is likely. It was pointed out that it needs to be expanded to get revenue from hikers and bikers and other non-consumptive user groups and then we would have concurrence. Anis pointed out that WDFW is looking at a \$30 million dollar shortfall/year that is not expected to be allocated from the general fund. It was suggested that we need to communicate with legislators on our concerns.

Future of GMAC: Group is not as productive as it could be. We spin our wheels over the same issues (chiefly predation). WDFW staff often feels attacked and don’t enjoy attending the meetings. Anis suggested we build a charter for GMAC that defines rules and responsibilities, potentially meet less often when input not required (just agenda with updated progress reports), define specific work products to work on, next time membership recruitment occurs to look at demography of hunters by age/race but keep input from groups represented. Jake suggested we are not facilitating or helping WDFW and suggested we need to look at ethical issues such as

lighted nocks, hunting opportunities, preference point system, draw sequence, private land access, activist category issues like wolf and cougar plans, and regulations.

Future agenda items:

- Continue Future of GMAC conversation
- Technology in hunting
- Bear timber damage
- Decision Packages and Legislature
- Meet the Director