

Game Management Advisory Council Meeting Notes

August 29, 2015

WCA Boardroom
1301 N. Dolarway Road
Ellensburg, WA 98926

Members in Attendance: Jerry Barron, Lee Davis, Dave Duncan, Ken Harris, James Horan, Terry Mansfield, Al Martz, Rob McCoy, Shawn McCully, Art Meikel, Darrell Moore, Mark Pidgeon, Reynold Sarns, James Stephenson, and Jake Weise

WDFW Staff: Mick Cope, Donny Martorello, Matthew Trenda

Welcome/Introduction/Approval of Meeting Notes: Mick welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made all around. Meeting notes from June 6 were discussed. Ken Harris brought up that his written comments regarding baiting were not included verbatim in the meeting notes. GMAC members who were in attendance at the June 6 meeting acknowledged that the comments were read and considered during GMAC discussion, though not recorded verbatim in the meeting notes, just as many comments are not captured verbatim. A discussion was held regarding the situation and it was clarified that baiting is an ongoing issue and will continue to be an ongoing issue.

June 6, 2015 meeting notes moved for adoption and seconded. One, Ken Harris, was opposed to adopting the meeting notes. All others in favor. Meeting notes adopted.

A moment of silence was held for the firefighters who have lost their lives fighting fires throughout the state and the northwest.

Hoof Disease Project Update

Mick gave an update on the status of the hoof disease project in Washington State (see Meeting Handouts). A timeline was presented that outlined the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's (WDFW) events, diagnostics, research, and management efforts in regards to hoof disease.

A packet of additional information was presented as well. Mick went over how WDFW is monitoring the distribution of Treponeme-associated Hoof Disease (TAHD) in Washington, as well as the prevalence. Over 300 volunteers conducted an in-depth citizen science survey in an attempt to understand the prevalence of TAHD in areas within Regions 5 and 6. Survival is also being monitored. WDFW collared 78 elk from affected areas to characterize the effects of hoof disease on annual survival of adult (two years or older) cow elk. Additional components, such as fitness and nutritional condition, are also measured.

Question: Has hoof disease been recorded in Yakima County?

Answer: Not at this time. Just because an elk is limping does not mean TAHD is present. There are a lot of different reasons an elk may be limping. Sometimes, hoof deformities are detected, but are not related to TAHD. The science has been effective in diagnosing TAHD.

Five GMUs (520, 522, 524, 550, 556) were utilized for the survival study. Collars were put on in February and the condition of the hooves was noted. This winter recaptures will be conducted to monitor changes in body condition and pregnancy status. Survival rates are at 95% so far in the study, which is good.

One interesting thing to monitor is whether or not any of the control group of elk will develop TAHD during the study.

Question: Is this disease being passed on to offspring?

Answer: It's not being passed on directly from mother to calf. It is not genetic or blood-related. While the calf may get it from the soil, it is not passed on from animal to animal.

Question: Does WDFW issue replacement tags?

Answer: If the animal is not fit for human consumption, a replacement tag can be issued. Hoof disease itself is not a reason for tag replacement. If something else is involved (e.g., another infection), WDFW will consider replacement tags.

Question: Has it spread from the original area?

Answer: It has spread since we first detected it, yes.

Comment: It is worth noting that it has been diagnosed and detected in Oregon as well.

Question: Have you looked at the movement data to see if there are differences between TAHD-infected elk and the control group?

Answer: Not at this time. None of the elk are moving very far though.

Question: Is this going to carry over to deer?

Answer: We do not know at this time. It has not been found in deer, and there are many deer who traverse these same areas.

Terry: As far as we know, it is elk-specific, though deer samples are going through the same detailed process. This is something that needs to be constantly monitored.

One additional piece to this is the euthanasia protocol developed by the agency. It is regarding the humane treatment of animals, when elk are unable to keep with the herd and are unable to move through the field at all. WDFW responds within a fairly short period of time and has staff who are able to handle those situations.

Drought and Fires – Game Management and Hunting

The drought and fire situation was discussed. Numerous hunters are concerned about closures and fire restrictions. Fire was added to the agenda as a necessity, as talking about the drought without the fires would not be effective. The discussion was expanded to include effects on hunter harvest, access, and the future of the burning areas.

Rob: Hunters may not know where to go if their traditional hunting areas are closed.

Mick: What does GMAC recommend WDFW do to help with these situations?

Lee: An active web page is the first step, listing closures, fire status, and other scenarios. GMUs that have fire should be closed entirely. WDFW should make contact with DNR and other agencies.

Discussion topics included asking other agencies to refer callers to WDFW as the go-to website for hunting-related access issues. Fire danger assessment should be included in any action, as some lands not currently experiencing active fires still should not be open to access.

Art: Contact lists should be added to the website.

Matthew: There is currently a list of major public landowners and their contact information available on the hunting access page. Private landowners will hopefully be added soon.

Mick presented a PowerPoint on fire status in Washington. The Okanogan Complex fire recently became the largest fire in state history.

Members emphasized that if land access is closed, it should be closed to all public, not just hunters. Land is either closed for public access or it is open.

There was discussion regarding fires affecting once-in-a-lifetime hunts and that they may have different options for point restoration or hunting than typical deer/elk permit hunts. It was recommended that the agency take species/hunt type into account. Also, WDFW may want to consider letting hunters decide before their hunt to get those points back or go on their hunt. Leaving it up to the individual could be more effective, unless the area is physically closed or inaccessible.

Art Meikel: In the past, sliding permit opportunities into the next year has been opposed. Also, for once-in-a-lifetime permits, point restoration is not as effective, due to how difficult it is to draw.

Email blasts will go out soon regarding fire status, as well as upcoming hunting prospects, regulations mobile apps, and the upcoming 2016 pamphlet photo contest. It was recommended that these emails feature certain key words so they are not passed over by those who should read them.

Recommendation: Getting the media to work with you, USFS, and DNR could be critical as the season progresses. Make it a public issue, not a hunter issue.

Rob: If any state sees significant fire danger, it's California, and I don't hear of any hunting seasons shutting down. Washington can get overblown in certain situations. Risk assessment is obviously important. All hunters want to go back to the place they hunt every year. When timberlands shut down access, there doesn't seem to be an option from the state. Is there any way to give people the ability to change their tags so they can continue to hunt those same areas that may reopen as we get later in the season?

Dave: Habitat conditions have changed greatly in the woods in Washington. Looking back on what worked in the past may not work today, due to changes in habitat.

Comment: We all need to go back to our groups and through communication means, communicate with hunters and the public to be careful and take precautions while they are out there.

Comment: What about the future due to these fires regarding hunting opportunity, access, and others?

Mick: Carlton Complex may be a way to look backwards and learn about the future in these cases. As more time passes, we will learn more about what our actions will be.

Hunting Works Washington

Rob: Mark mentioned a new effort to promote hunting that I would like to add to the agenda today.

Mark: Hunting Works Washington is a public relations effort promoting positive impacts hunters have on economies. Other states have been very effective with a hunter surcharge to set up pro-hunting campaigns in their areas. Hunting Works Washington is funded by the National Shooting Sports Foundation and is launching September 10. An example is Hunting Works Minnesota. This is free and does not cost us anything. I ask that you consider joining this effort, because they want as many supporters as possible to make this program as effective as it can be. If interested in joining, contact Mark Pidgeon.

Dave: It takes no legislative action and there is no surcharge on hunting licenses, which will be great for Washington State. It brings rural communities into it and information on how hunters contribute to those communities. Hunters and sportsmen have not been vocal for a long time. I see a lot of changes, and seeing that we are gathering a lot more. This is a way to gain and get more vocal.

Working Lunch Topics

Sage Grouse CCAA: Dave Duncan gave an update on Sage Grouse CCAA. There are restrictions on private property, and owners are being penalized for success. No preventive

measures for predator control. WCA will, at best, take a neutral decision. It is heading back to single species management and not getting to the root causes. A lot of time has been put into this.

Question: What are the conservation measures if the CCAA is signed?

Answer: Noise, roads, human presence. Allowing agencies on the property as well.

Comment: Ravens have increased in numbers, and ravens are a real factor in sage grouse. At least in sage grouse habitat, ravens should be addressed.

Pulse of the Commission: Mick gave an overview of the Commission. The newest additions to the Commission have a thoughtful approach and consider each topic. Both should do a nice job. The Commission Chair, Brad Smith, will do a nice job as Chair. We have been through a couple issues that have been difficult at times, including conflict issues and the 3-year package, and the Commission has been engaged, asked questions, and has been involved so far.

Pittman Robertson (PR) Funding in WDFW: Mick gave an overview of PR funding in the department. Over the last few years, funding has trended up. In 2005, PR funding was around \$5 million, while in 2015, funding has been around \$15 million. This money is split between land management, game management, non-game management (generally sage and sharp-tailed grouse), science division, and hunter education.

Dave would like a full discussion on the agenda for a future meeting, including a full breakdown of where this funding goes. This motion was seconded. Curiosity about whether money is going to fund field work or to additional staff. Some work has been postponed due to lack of funding, even though it seems money has increased. Members expressed desire to know where money is going.

Mick gave a brief description on some projects that are receiving these funds. Collars and helicopter time are the biggest costs in general, besides employee time. The future agenda item will consider all fund sources, not just PR.

Baiting Rules Sub-Committee Report

Terry spoke regarding the efforts of the sub-committee and progress made so far. The first meeting was getting oriented and getting the different perspectives. Different approaches to this topic are being considered. We want to know about the physiology of deer and elk and the effects baiting may have. Hunting guides use baiting to serve the public. The group is willing to listen to different opinions and different perspectives.

One thing to consider is what baiting means in different areas of Washington. Is it realistic to come back with a single recommendation or with different perspectives? Are there points in between? At this point, we are still listing and formulating that direction and what's expected from the ad-hoc committee. September 26 is the next meeting, and we hope to come back to GMAC with a more firm direction.

Mick: The hope was that the group would come back to GMAC with some options that could be considered to present to the Commission..

Lee echoed Terry that another meeting is necessary. Hopefully something in the middle can be found.

There was discussion about whether baiting for deer and elk hunting was legal in the past. Some members were interested in knowing this while others wanted to focus on the future. Some work will be put into figuring out past rules.

There was discussion about rules in other states. Other states' regulations differ, but not a lot. In the west, there are only three states that have no regulations regarding deer and elk baiting, and Washington is one of them. A number of states allow it, just not during hunting seasons. Some allow only on private lands, not public. Some allow only specific areas. Ten days before the season seems to be the cutoff in the majority of states.

Question: Have we polled the groups we represent about their feelings regarding bating? It may be good so you are not acting strictly on personal beliefs.

The sub-committee will continue to discuss the issue and bring more information to the next GMAC meeting. A discussion will occur at the December GMAC meeting in preparation for making rule recommendations for the March/April Commission meeting.

Wolf Population Update

Donny gave an overview of the Washington wolf population and presented a PowerPoint. There have been several depredations since the last GMAC meeting. Trapping over the summer continued. A collar was put in the Dirty Shirt pack and the Lookout pack. Trapping is currently on pause due to the fires and summer temperatures. Eleven wolves have been collared since January 2015. There are collars on 14 wolves in 10 of the 16 packs. Trapping will continue in the future. The goal is to get collars in each pack.

Wolf conflict deterrence updates were developed this year. They have the latest info on each pack. A chronology of events is also being developed for those packs who need them, such as Dirty Shirt and Huckleberry.

Dirty Shirt depredations: Four depredations. No lethal control has been used since all four depredations occurred before WDFW arrived and added additional nonlethal methods to the operation. If there is a fifth depredation, a kill permit will be issued to producers in the grazing allotment and nearby areas to take up to two wolves. A sixth depredation means WDFW would take lethal action. This rule is in place through the end of the grazing season (mid-late October).

Teaway depredation: A calf was killed in the area. No depredations have occurred since. Needs are being met by the producer, so no new nonlethal methods have been introduced. WDFW is not the lead agency in this case. That duty falls to USFWS. WDFW follows USFWS.

Huckleberry depredation: One guarding dog was attacked. Guarding animals are defined as livestock under the Wolf Management Plan. In this case, since lethal action was taken last year, the total amount of depredations is set at two for agency action. If there is one more depredation from the Huckleberry pack, WDFW initiates lethal control. WDFW is sticking to the Wolf Plan and following the approved flow chart for depredations.

WDFW believes Huckleberry pack has split into two packs, a North Huckleberry and a South Huckleberry. The collared wolf is with the North Huckleberry pack.

Question: Has the producer maybe wanting to get out of the business affected the thinking when dealing with this issue?

Answer: It has. We do not want that to happen. The goal is coexistence, and these discussions will happen with the Wolf Advisory Group (WAG). Since the depredation, the producer has implemented several nonlethal methods while others are not realistic or would not be a fit. The producer is paying out of pocket for feed, and has also heavily invested in additional guard dogs.

Dave Duncan outlined a future WAG meeting agenda that calls to put something together to promote hunters and the benefits of hunting, including why hunters hunt, the culture of hunting, conservation, and predator-prey management. They would like a guest speaker who will help in informing WAG. He wanted to alert GMAC of this plan, and would like the groups present to contribute if they can, as it will cost money to put together.

Question: Is it now more difficult with 18 members in the WAG?

Answer: The increase in group size makes it more difficult, but with the addition of Francine Madden, communication is coming along. The hope is to find a common ground.

Technology in Hunting – Drones, etc...

At this time, hunting with use of aircraft is illegal. While not specifically defined in rule, WDFW considers drones as aircraft at this time. WDFW would like some help in forward thinking on this issue, and how we might want to approach hunting and technology. In the Game Management Plan, we outline a 3-year process for these sorts of technology issues. Enforcement Division has raised the topic of drones in particular. Enforcement is also asking about other issues that may need to be regulated.

The group discussed current uses of drones and, while some thought other issues were more important, a majority support WDFW addressing drone use for hunting sooner than later. Some raised a concern about using drones on public land, however, WDFW only has authority over WDFW lands unless it is hunting related. There was a recommendation is to define aircraft to include drones so there is more clarity with the law.

Recommendation re: other technology - People come up with a variety of “new” things, however, unless there is some immediate need, we want to keep to that 3-year cycle to deal with these things.

Next meeting date: December 5, 2015

Draft List of Items for next meeting

- Changes to preference points system
- PR funding detailed discussion
- Colockum Bull Elk Study Update
- Wolf Population Update
- Fire effects on priority habitats
- Sage grouse post-listing status update (Shawn McCully can report some information)
- Baiting discussion and report from sub-committee
- Website accessibility update
- WDFW Director will present

Meeting adjourned