

Game Management Advisory Council Meeting Notes

December 5, 2015

WCA Boardroom
1301 N Dolarway Road
Ellensburg, WA 98926

Members in Attendance: Rob McCoy, Al Martz, Art Meikel, Dave Duncan, Gregg Bafundo, Ken Harris, Lee Davis, Mark Pidgeon, Paul Schneider, Reynold Sarns, Shawn McCully, Terry Mansfield, Warren Gimlin, Bobbie Thornley, Ray Crisp (Alternate), Randy Mesenbrink

WDFW Staff: Nate Pamplin, Mick Cope, Rich Harris, Scott Becker, Matthew Trenda

Welcome/Introduction/Approval of Meeting Notes: Mick welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made all around. The meeting notes from the previous meeting were discussed. The only change was that the Director will not be able to present at this meeting, as originally hoped. An effort will be made for the next GMAC meeting. A movement was made to adopt the notes as amended. All in favor and meeting notes were approved.

Changes to the Preference Point System: Rich Harris gave a presentation on points, preferences, and possibilities for the preference points system going into the future. The presentation will be available on the GMAC page on the WDFW website. Rich reviewed the current system. WDFW took suggestions in summer 2014 on how to give further advantage to hunters with a high number of points. Many ideas were brought forth. There are several factors that go into the drawing process, including hunter recruitment, competition among hunters with high points, and probability curves.

One system WDFW considered implementing was a “loyalty” category, open only to those with a minimum number of points. After researching the effectiveness of a system like this, it was determined that results would depend on a few things, including the minimum amount of points required, the proportion of permits reserved for the “loyalty” category, and the proportion of loyal hunters who apply under both the “loyalty” category and the regular drawings. In some cases, hunters would have lower odds in the loyalty program.

WDFW looked at the data and ran simulations, researching a number of alternate strategies and programs. It was determined that the current system is actually working better than the alternate strategies.

After Rich’s presentation, the floor was opened up for discussion. A variety of ideas about preference points were discussed, including allowing a percentage of the points to be held for those with maximum points; making hunters decide between putting in for deer and elk or applying for goat, sheep, and moose (there was a fair amount of support for this); several pointed out that when categories were created, it made it harder for everyone to draw, and it was noted that about 1/3 of GMAC didn’t support creating all of the categories at the time;

Note: after the meeting, staff investigated a question about how often the goat, sheep, moose permits are not picked up by people who won the drawing. After talking with WDFW Licensing, it appears that, on average, it happens about once per year for all of these permits, combined.

WDFW staff discussed some of the difficulties we have had working with our existing licensing system. It is inflexible for many things, but we are going to be working toward a new system over the next couple of years.

Comment: A while ago, names of permit winners were available. Making those available again may go a long way for transparency and letting people know that real people are being drawn for these permits.

Main comments from the preference point discussion included making unpurchased permits available to others and switching to an option-based program, where hunters select between applying for deer and elk or applying for moose, goat, sheep.

Baiting Rules: Mick gave a presentation on baiting rules and the recent history of the process. The Department was tasked with reviewing baiting rules for the 2015-2021 Game Management Plan and the 2015-2017 3-year package. The Commission made their decision in April for one year, and asked the Department to revisit the topic for the next year. A Deer and Elk Baiting Committee was developed by GMAC to further review the baiting topic. The task for the committee was finding a middle ground between both sides. A variety of discussions took place describing where the committee had reached so far and that there was likely middle ground to be found that likely included a volume restriction, although not everyone would be happy with that middle ground.

Some additional discussion was had regarding insight on the need for hunters to work together on issues for the future of hunting. There was interest in bringing hunters together to protect the idea of public trust and also recognize that there is choice among hunters such that not every method of hunting can be put in a rule.

Mick went over the steps forward. GMAC will see the rules in February and discuss them at the March GMAC meeting. The Commission hearing will be in March, where proposed rules will be considered and reviewed. A decision will come in April.

Break for Lunch

Sage Grouse Update: Shawn gave an update on sage and sharp-tailed grouse. Sharp-tailed populations have gone up in the state, however fires have affected some of their habitats. Populations should survive these fires, but winter habitat will be scarce for a bit.

Sage grouse are doing well again this year, particularly in Douglas County. One new lek was found on Badger Mountain. Sage grouse are not doing as well on the Yakama Reservation, and there are a few in Swanson Lakes area. GPS collars have shown interesting use of habitat,

including some more than expected use of CRP fields. Predators can impact sage grouse in these small populations, and some predators have been removed, including coyotes and ravens.

Fall Hunting Success: Mark Pidgeon gave a short presentation on fall hunting success. He shared a number of good hunting stories submitted by members of the public.

Shawn thanked the Department for offering the Chelan disabled hunt for sheep, as it was a fantastic experience and helped create a life memory for a family.

Nate brought up that the Photo Contest for the 2016 Big Game pamphlet is Finding Inner Strength, a tribute to disabled hunters and their hunting companions. He asked members to help get the word out.

Game Division Funding and Pittman-Robertson Funding in WDFW: Mick and Nate went over the funding for Game Division and PR in WDFW. Nate presented a PowerPoint looking at a budget breakdown and funding information.

The total for the biennium budget is a little over \$70 million dollars.

The Pittman-Robertson (Wildlife Restoration Program) was adopted in 1937, signed by FDR. This was a self-imposed tax created by sportsmen (user pay, user benefit). Funds are apportioned to states based on a set formula (area, license holders, with min/max). This fund source really is the backbone of the Wildlife Program.

When making investments with new PR, we want to be consistent with the fund source and also be consistent with the Strategic Plan, the Wildlife Program Plan, and the Game Management Plan. We want to track one-time costs versus permanent costs. Unspent money does roll forward, which helps with an uncertain future. We can sometimes purposefully roll money forward.

Investing in resources with the PR bump has allowed for additional management possibilities.

PR does break down by division within the Wildlife Program, with some funds going to Game, Lands, Science, Hunter Education, and Diversity. Nate went over what the funds in each division go towards, breaking down the different projects Wildlife Program has been involved in over the past few years.

Cougar Rule: Nate went over the cougar rule and the timeline of what played out during the past year. This timeline is available on the GMAC webpage. The Governor does have the authority to direct the Commission to amend the state rule. The Governor made his statement because he felt there was a procedural error. An emergency rule was filed that drops the late season harvest guideline to 12-16%.

WDFW is getting together internally to provide cougar estimates across the state, and also to inform the public that the cougar rule is on the agenda for the March Commission meeting. The

public hearing is at the March Commission meeting. The procedure will be followed closely, and WDFW wants to do their best as an agency to preserve the Commission's decision-making space. We want the Commission to operate and be able to listen to public comments and consider them when making decisions.

Wildlife Conflict: Mick presented the steps forward for Wildlife Conflict. Most of the rules were amended in certain ways and are not entirely new. The presentation will be available on the GMAC webpage. Mick briefly went over each rule that was brought before the Commission and discussed. Most of the changes in the compensation rule were about giving landowners more flexibility and time in regards to compensation on commercial crop or livestock damage.

The special trapping permit was revamped in a number of ways as well, with some areas clarified, such as the application process.

Vehicle-Killed Wildlife Salvage: Mick gave an overview of the draft rule for vehicle-killed wildlife salvage. The Commission has requested that the Department look into a retention policy. Montana passed a law in 2013, while Idaho passed rules in 2012. WDFW has been tasked with designing a salvage policy similar to those two states.

Montana's deals only with deer, elk, moose, and antelope. The permit can be downloaded online or issued by an Enforcement officer. Idaho includes many more species in the rules. The two states differ in certain areas, but the base piece of having the permit available online is there.

WDFW's existing rule was outlined. It will need to change, but to what degree depends on the number of concerns addressed. WDFW put together a draft rule change and asked for feedback from staff members in the field. Concerns included safety on roadways, antlers, potential abuse, fit for consumption, existing meat donation programs, benefits for scavenger species, trespassing on private property, and how to issue a permit to process, among other things.

Idaho and Montana thought through many of these issues already. While some aspects are undoubtedly different, many of them have been addressed and can be adjusted to fit Washington. Collaboration is key going forward.

A variety of comments were made regarding implementation. Specific caution was raised when considering trespassing on private property and allowing someone to keep antlers may not be a bad thing. The general consensus from GMAC members was that this would be a good rule to implement and would be a benefit. Mick did mention that safety on the roadways of Washington could be a concern, as roads are busier in Washington than they are in Montana or Idaho.

Hoof Disease Investigation Update: Mick gave an update on the ongoing hoof disease investigation, presenting a PowerPoint to the GMAC members. There are three goals, including distribution and prevalence, survival, and productivity of elk with hoof disease. There was a citizen-science based approach, with surveys taking place from March-May. One hundred seventy-five surveys were conducted across 29 GMUs in 10 counties. Surveys covered Pacific County all the way down to Clark County. About 2600 elk were observed. About 50% of the groups had at least one limping elk, but the study was not able to determine how many

individuals were limping. The probability of encountering a group with hoof disease was modeled and a map was generated (See the heat map on the PowerPoint presentation available on the GMAC webpage). This is only one year's worth of data. It was a great effort, and WDFW appreciates the work and assistance provided by the volunteers.

Moving forward, WDFW has initiated a pilot effort to use hunter-harvested elk to study as well. Samples will be sent to the lab for TAHD detection. The citizen-science survey approach will also be refined to address detection issues.

More information can be found on the WDFW website at: http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/health/hoof_disease/

Wolf Population Update: Scott Becker gave an update on wolf populations in the state. Monitoring and trapping efforts are still ongoing. The majority of wolf packs are still in the northeast part of the state. Wolf territory can be up to 300 square miles, which does make documenting a challenge.

There has been a steady increase to the wolf population (minimum known number of wolves) since 2008, when the first pack was documented. It has been around 38% per year for average growth. Pack numbers have increased as well.

Trapping and monitoring takes extreme patience and persistence, as trapping a wolf to collar it can be a very slow process. Traps need to be put in a position for success. WDFW has had pretty good luck overall. The goal is to get at least one collar in as many packs as possible during the summer. This allows WDFW to trap additional wolves in those packs during the winter months through aerial captures.

The best times to trap include late spring/early summer and late summer/early fall. Mid-summer is usually too hot and pups are too small for a collar to fit. In 2015, there have been 15 wolves captured in nine packs (plus one lone wolf). For monitoring right now, there are 14 active collars in 10 packs. Some collars have failed or fallen off at this point. There are also areas where public sightings have increased that WDFW continues to monitor.

The future of wolf monitoring in Washington is that more challenges will develop as more wolves occupy the landscape. Developing alternative population estimation techniques will be imperative. Montana and Idaho are also working on these techniques. WDFW is in the very early stages at this point.

Sheep depredations are more variable than cattle, due to the nature of the livestock. About 12% of known Washington packs are known to have depredated on livestock.

Several questions were asked and answered ranging from the effects of fire on wolf recovery to legislative attempts to affect wolf management. WDFW staff shared insight and encouraged people to continue to report sightings as public reports continue to be valuable.

WAG Notice: Dave Duncan announced that Shane Mahoney will be speaking at the next WAG meeting at 5:30 on Sunday, December 13 in Spokane. Dave would like as many people from the hunting community to be there as possible. It has been a huge investment and to have representation from the hunting community would go a long way.

Potential March Meeting Agenda Items

- Collockum Bull Study Update
- Hunting Rules for March Commission meeting
- Wolf Population Update
- Recruitment/Retention Committee Update
- Turkey tags (incentive programs?)
- Allocation sub-committee (Hunting numbers)
- Legislative Proposals for 2017
- Habitat goals (shrubsteppe, land acquisition, etc.)
- Hunter Access Update

March 5 was decided as the next tentative meeting date.

Meeting Adjourned