



# MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS

## CAC MEETING MINUTES

February 27, 2024

### In Attendance:

**Members:** Tim Aldrich, Louie Bouma, Peggy Cordell, Kit Fischer, Matt Fregerio, Everett Headley, Laurie Johnston, Denley Loge, Bill Mitchell, Gregory Price, Pat Sweeney, Susan Thraen

**Online:** R2 Commissioner Jeff Burrows and Marc Cooke

**R2 FWP managers:** Randy Arnold, Vivaca Crowser, Morgan Dollinger, Kyle Miller, Pat Saffel, Dori Schiele and Alyssa Sukopp

**Other FWP staff & guests:** Upper Clark Fork wildlife biologist, Kirstie Yeager, and Upper Clark Fork fisheries biologist, Caleb Uerling. Parks and Recreation Board member, Jody Loomis. Guest, Jack Reneau

### Welcome, Overview & Introductions

Vivaca and Randy welcomed all in attendance gave an overview of what was going to be discussed for the evening. FWP fisheries biologist, Caleb Uerling, and FWP wildlife biologist, Kirstie Yeager, introduced themselves. Vivaca discussed upcoming CAC meeting dates; May 2<sup>nd</sup> is on the calendar. As a note, all CAC board member's terms are expiring this year. We are considering having staggered terms for the future.

### Everett Headley (CAC Chair): Private Land Public Wildlife Council (PLPW) Updates

- Still revising hunter/landowner stewardship program
  - Considering using a bonus point system
  - Looking at having hunters take a class to use BMAs
  - Hoping to increase technology use

Exploring Tech BMA Sub-Committee:

- Looking into a reservation system
- Push notifications in the app
- Hunters can send thank you notes to landowners online
- Hunter experience surveys in the app hopefully in the future

### Pat Saffel: Introducing Caleb Uerling and Upper Clark Fork

- The Upper Clark Fork is a superfund site
- Brown trout populations are down; about 1/5 of what they should be, and they are continuing a downward trend
- There are many federal and state agencies involved in researching the causes to help come up

with potential solutions

- The Federal goal is environmental and human health
- The State goal is restoration of fish and wildlife resources

#### **Caleb Uerling: Upper Clark Fork Trout Population**

- Looking at brown trout numbers:
  - Biologists use electroshocking and tagging to count fish larger than 7 inches in specific stretches of rivers
  - Starting in 2015 there has been a dramatic drop and continuing downward trend of trout numbers
  - Unexpected loss of recruitment began in 2018
  - More stable brown trout numbers downstream of Deer Lodge
- Otolith Microchemistry: 2016/2017 study and follow-up study in 2022
  - Otolith microchemistry is a technique using ear bones to determine where fish have lived throughout their lives and how old they are.
  - It uses chemistry to assign them back to a specific natal tributary
  - Results showed a 33% annual mortality rate for brown trout, which is a normal number. However, recruitment has dropped to near 0%
- Next Steps:
  - Continue early age class monitoring
  - Determine when/where juvenile mortality is occurring
  - Study reproduction & reproduction success
  - Water quality monitoring

#### **Kirstie Yeager: Spotted Dog WMA Grazing and Virtual Fence**

- Spotted Dog WMA was purchased from Rock Creek Cattle Co. in 2010 and has been in public ownership as a WMA since
- Spotted Dog Work Group formed in 2013
- Why graze the WMA?
  - Meet biological, ecological, and social objectives on both public and neighboring private lands
- Exchange of Use (EOU) Agreements
  - The McQueary Ranch has an EOU from 2019-2024
  - Allows McQueary cattle to graze on specific pastures within the WMA (pastures rotate yearly) in exchange for resting private pastures for winter use by elk on the ranch and some public hunting on those private lands.
- Results:
  - Treatment was achieved in some parts of the pastures
  - Virtual fence technology improved containment of cattle
  - 150+ hunter days were provided
- Working on 2024 draft EA for potential grazing and water development on Spotted Dog
  - Comments are being reviewed and addressed
  - A Decision Notice will be issued later this spring/summer

#### **Randy Arnold: Brief Blackfoot Clearwater Game Range Update**

- There will be a new system this year to access the Blackfoot-Clearwater Game Range in an effort to improve public safety and reduce congestion along busy roadways in the area.

- People wishing to enter at noon by vehicle, will need to register ahead of time and will be given an entry order.
- Public meetings took place in Missoula, Seeley Lake and online to gather feedback and ideas.
- The next step is to communicate with the public and begin taking registrations for entry...stay tuned.

**Closing:**

Meeting adjourned at 9:10pm.